

A
LETTER
TO THE
DEISTS:

SHEWING,

*That the Gospel of Jesus Christ
is no Imposture; but the
Sacred Truth of God.*

B Y
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And Arch-Deacon of Suffolk.

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Gentlemen,

IF I am not mistaken, the reason you give for your Renouncing that Religion, ye were baptized into, and is the Religion of the Country in which ye were born, is, *That the Gospel of Jesus Christ is an Imposture*: An Assertion that I tremble to repeat. But whether that *Gospel* be right, or ye are in the right that deny it, will appear from the Consideration of the Nature of an *Imposture*; and from the Life of that most infamous *Impostor* (whom we, as well as you, acknowledge to be such) which I have before given you the exact Picture of. And if you can find any one lineament of it, any one line of all its filthy features in the whole *Gospel of Jesus Christ*, I durst say (so sure I am of the contrary) that

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for the sake hereof I will give you all you contend for, and yield you up the whole Cause. And therefore, that we may thoroughly examine the Matter, I will lay down, in the first place, What an *Imposture* is; 2dly. What are the inseparable Marks and Characters of it; And, 3dly. That none of these Marks can belong to the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*. And when I have done this, I hope I shall convince all such of you, who have not totally abandoned your selves to your Infidelity, That the *Gospel of Jesus Christ* is that sacred Truth of God, which you are all bound to believe.

CHAP. I.

What an Imposture is.

AN *Imposture*, taking the word in the full latitude of its signification, may denote any *lye* or *cheat*, whereby one Man imposeth upon another. But it is most frequently used to express such *cheats* as are imposed on us by those who come with false *characters* of themselves, pretending to be what they are not in order

to delude and deceive. And when this character, which is thus falsely assumed, is no less than a pretended *Embassy* from Heaven, and under the credit of it a New Religion is delivered to the World as coming from God, which is nothing else but a *Forgery*, invented by the first Propagators of it, to impose a cheat upon mankind, it amounts to be an *Imposture* in that sense, in which you would have the *Gospel of Jesus Christ* to be such. And in this sense it is to be understood in the Controversie between us ; so that the whole *Question* which we are to examine into, is, Whether the *Christian Religion* be a Truth really given unto us by *divine Revelation* from God our *Creatour*, or else a meer humane invention, contrived by the first *Propagators* of it, to impose a cheat upon mankind. And when I have fully disproved the latter part of this *Question*, that the *Christian Religion* cannot be such an invention, contrived to cheat and impose upon us, that will sufficiently prove the former, that it must be that divine Truth, which all we that are *Christians* firmly believe it to be.

That it is possible such a cheat may be imposed upon Men, cannot be denied. It is sufficiently proved in the foregoing

History, which is a very full instance of it ; and I have laid it before you for this very purpose, that you may therein see clearly delineated and displayed in all its proper colours the whole nature of the thing, which you charge our *holy Religion* with. All that I contend for, is, That if *Christianity* be such an *Imposture*, as we all acknowledge the *Religion* of *Mahomet* to be, it must be just such another thing as that is, with all the same Marks, Characters, and Properties of an *Imposture* belonging thereto ; and that if none of those Marks, Characters, or Properties can be discovered in it, it must be a clear eviction of the whole charge ; and manifestly prove, That our *holy Religion* cannot be that thing, which you would have it to be. For our only way of knowing things, is by their Marks and Properties ; and it is by them only that we can discover what the nature of them is. It is only by the Marks and Properties of a Man, that we know a Man from another living Creature ; for we cannot see the Essences of things. And so it must be only by the Marks and Properties of an *Imposture*, that we can know an *Imposture* from that which is a real truth, when attested unto us. And as where we find

find none of the Marks and Properties of a Man, we assuredly know that cannot be a Man, how much soever any one may tell us that it is: So where we find none of the Marks and Properties of an *Imposture*, we may assuredly know that cannot be an *Imposture*, how much soever you, or any other like you, may assert it so to be.

Now the *Marks* and *Characters* which I look on to be inseparable from every such *Imposture*, are these following :
1. That it must always have for its end some carnal interest. 2. That it can have none but wicked Men for the Authors of it. 3. That both these must necessarily appear in the very contexture of the *Imposture* it self. 4. That it can never be so framed, but that it must contain some palpable falsities, which will discover the falsity of all the rest. 5. That where-ever it is first propagated, it must be done by craft and fraud. 6. That when entrusted with many conspirators, it can never be long concealed : And, 7. That it can never be established, unless backed with force and violence. That all these must belong to every *Imposture*, and all particularly did so to *Mahometism*; and that none of them can be charged upon

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Christianity, is what I shall now proceed to shew you of each of them in their order.

S E C T. I.

I. That every *Imposture* must have for its end some carnal interest, is a thing so plain and evident, that I suppose it will not need much proof. For to impose a cheat upon mankind, and in a matter of that great importance, as all that have any Religion hold that to be, is a thing of that difficulty to compass, and of that danger to attempt, that it cannot be conceived, why any one should put himself upon such a design, that doth not propose some very valuable advantage to himself in the success. To cheat one Man is not always so easie a matter, or is it without its mischiefs and inconveniences in the discovery. But to enterprize a cheat upon all mankind, and in a thing of that importance, as the introducing of a New *Religion*, and the abolishing of the Old one (to which so many, both by custom and education will be always zealously affected, be it what it will) must be an undertaking of the greatest difficulty and hazard imaginable.

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For whoever engageth himself in such a plot of *Imposture*, must unavoidably meet with many strong oppositions to struggle with in the management of it, which will continually put his thoughts upon the rack to find out devices to surmount them, and his body to incessant pains and labour to bring them into Execution ; and for the effecting hereof, he must have some confidants to assist him, some to help forward the design, whom he must trust with the secret of it ; and the more he hath of such, the more he hazards all to a discovery. And all this while his mind will be fill'd with anxious cares, and his thoughts distracted with many uneasie and affrighting apprehensions (as is usual with Men on wicked designs) about the success, and every failure will expose him to that terrible revenge from those he attempts to delude, as such a villainy, whenever detected, most justly deserves. This was *Mahomer's* case all the while he was propagating his *Imposture* at Mecca, and so it must be of every other such *Impostor* also. And when a man puts himself upon all this, the nature of the thing manifestly leads us to conclude, he must propose something to himself hereby which may make him amends for all

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in the result. For when so much is put to hazard, men do not use to do it for nothing. There must always be some great interest in the bottom of such a design, something that the undertaker values at a more than ordinary rate to make him engage on so exceeding difficult and dangerous an enterprise. For where-ever the venture is great, it must be taken for granted there is an end proposed, which in the estimation of the venturer is equivalent thereto. What it was that put *Mahomet* on his *Imposture* the foregoing *History* of his life sufficiently shews, it was his ambition and his lust. To have the sovereignty over his Country to gratify his ambition, and as many women as he pleased to satiate his lust was what he aimed at, and to gain himself a party for the compassing of this was the grand design of that new *Religion* which he invented, and the whole end and reason of his imposing it on those he deluded thereinto. And whoever pursues the like method must certainly have some such end in it, it being totally incredible that any one should take upon him the trouble, fatigue and danger of carrying on such a cheat only for cheating sake. But here we challenge all the enemies of that
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holy Religion which we profess, to find out any thing like this in the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*, any thing that favours of worldly interest either in him the first *Founder* of our *Faith*, or in any of his *holy Apostles*, who were the first *Propagators* of it. *Vauinus*, one of the most zealous Champions of Impiety that ever appeared against the *Christian Cause* (for he died a Martyr for it) hath attempted this: but after the most accurate and diligent search, which so keen an Adversary could make, he was forced to give up the Point, and plainly acknowledge, that in the whole series of the *History* and actions of our *Saviour*, he could not find any thing that he could charge with secular interest or design to blast him or his *Religion* with. And if you will renew the same attempt, though you extend the inquiry much farther, even to his *Apostles*, and all the rest of his *Disciples*, who first preached this holy Religion to the *World*, and take in to your assistance all the enemies of it; after the strictest scrutiny that you can make, you will never have any better success herein.

For had our *Saviour's* design been to seduce the People for his own interest, he must have taken the same course, that other

other Seducers do. He must have flattered them in their humours, and formed his doctrines to their fancies ; courted those that were in greatest authority and esteem with them, and made it his business mostly to preach against and decry those who were least in their favour, and studied and practised all other such arts of popularity, whereby he might best insinuate into their good liking, and gain that interest with them, as might be sufficient to serve his purpose and obtain the end proposed. These were the methods whereby *Mahomet* first propagated his *Imposture*, and these are they which all others must take, whose purpose it is to deceive the people. But our *Saviour* in every particular acted contrary hereto, which sufficiently proves that he had no such design to compass. For he freely preached against whatever he found blameable in the people, spared not their most beloved errors, or framed his doctrines to indulge them in any one evil practice, how predominant so ever amongst them, and was so far from courting those in the greatest authority and esteem with them, that he was most sharp and bitter against them above all others, whom they most idolized, I mean the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* ;

sees; For he on all occasions detected their *Hypocrites*, and laid open their evil practices, and in the severest manner rebuked and condemned them for their iniquity therein, even to the preferring and justifying before them the wicked *Publicans*, who for their exactions and oppressions upon the people in their gathering the publick *Taxes* were held among them the most hated of men and the worst of sinners. And therefore, though his *Miracles* often drew their admiration and their applause on the one hand, his doctrines and his preachings as fast alienated them from him on the other; so that those very same Men, who, for the sake of the former, followed him often in multitudes, and were ready to acknowledge him to be the *Messias*, were as violently set against him at other times for the sake of the latter, and at last crucified him on the account thereof. And is it possible to conceive, that he, who took all those courses so contrary to the humour of the people, without regarding how much they tended to exasperate them against him, should have any interest or design of his own to serve himself of them.

When our *Saviour* took upon him to be

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be the *Messias* that was promised, had he done it only as an *Impostor* to promote a secular interest and design of his own, he would certainly have assumed that character according to those Notions in which the *Jews* expected him. For in this case the expectation of the people must have been the grand motive to the *Imposture*, and their looking for such a *Messias* to come the main inducing reason of his putting himself thereon, and therefore to be sure, had he been an *Impostor*, he would have offered himself to them no otherwise than just such a *Messias*, as their notions of him would have him to be; and there are two especial reasons which in this case would have determined him hereto. 1. Because those notions offered to him the highest secular interest, that could be attained unto: And, 2. Because the suiting of his pretensions exactly according to them, would have been the readiest and most likely way for him to carry the interest, whatever it was, which you may suppose him to have aimed at.

And, first, the notions which the *Jews* had of the *Messias*, offered him the highest secular interest that could be attained unto; and therefore to be sure, when he took upon him to be that *Messias*, had he

he done it only as an *Impostor* for a secular interest, he would have laid hold of that interest offered, and under the character which he assum'd most certainly have claim'd all that, which according to those notions the *Messias* was to have. For this was nothing less than a most glorious secular Kingdom, the expectations of the Jews being then concerning this matter the same as they have ever since continued amongst them; that the *Messias** was to be a Secular Prince, who was to deliver them from their enemies, and restore the Kingdom of David at Jerusalem, and there reign in great glory and splendour over the whole House of Israel. And what greater or more desirable interest can this World afford, than such a state of advancement? And

what is there that is more valued and esteemed in the opinion of all mankind, than the attainment thereof? And at that time when our *Saviour* first appeared on his *Mission*, there was the most favourable juncture, that could offer it self, for his setting up for all this: For then the People

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* *The Messias shall come and restore the Kingdom of the House of David to the ancient state of its former Dominion, and shall rebuild the Temple, and gather together the dispersed of Israel; and then shall be re-established all the Legal Rites and Constitutions as in former times: and Sacrifices shall be offered, and the Sabbatical Years and Jubile's observed according to every Precept delivered in the Law.* Maimonides in *Yad Hachazakah* in *Traict. de Regibus & Bellis eorum*, cap. 11. §. 1.

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of the *Jews* being fallen under the Yoke of the *Roman Government*, and also grown very impatient under it, entertained a general expectation of the speedy Coming of the *Messias*, under that character of a *Temporal Prince*, which they had conceited of him, to deliver them from this bondage, and by conquering those who subjected them thereto, again restore the *Kingdom of Israel*. And these hopes had then taken that possession of their minds;

*¶ Mark 15. v. 43. Luke 2.
v. 38. &c. 24. v. 31. Acts 1. v. 6.*
From all which places compared together, it appears, that there was among the *Jews*, in the time of our *Saviour*, a general expectation of the speedy Coming of the *Messias*, and that their notion was of a temporal deliverance and a temporal restoration of the *Kingdom of Israel* to be effected by him. And this expectation was it which made the multitude so ready to join themselves to *Theudas*, and after to *Judas of Galilee*, of whom mention is made *Acts 5. v. 36, 37.* and after that to an *Egyptian Jew*, *Acts 21. v. 38.* on their pretending to be the persons from whom this deliverance was expected.

(*) *Josephus* not only makes mention of *Theudas*, and *Judas of Galilee* and the *Egyptian*, of

and they were all so full of them, that every one stood in a manner ready and prepared to join with them, whosoever should take upon him to be the person, as sufficiently appeareth not only from ¶ the *Scriptures*, but also from the *History* which (*) *Josephus* wrote of those times. And therefore had our *Saviour*, by taking upon him to be the *Messias*, aimed only as an *Impostor* at a Secular interest, What reason can be given, why he should not with the name of the *Messias*, have also claimed

claimed this grand interest of a *Kingdom*, which according to the opinion of all those, who expected a *Messias*, belonged thereto? or why he should not in so favourable a juncture, as was then offer'd for it, have possessed himself thereof? But he was so far from doing either of these, that he waved both, and not only omitted this opportunity of possessing himself of this *Kingdom*, but also renounced and disclaim'd the whole thereof. For instead of laying any pretence to it, he set himself to confute those very notions which gave it unto him, and to convince the People that they were mistaken in them, and thereby overthrew all that which offered unto him the highest Secular interest which the Men of this World use to aim at. And not only so, but advanced in the stead of those Errours, such

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whom we have an account in Scripture, *Antiq lib. 20 c 2. & c. 6.* but also of several others, who on the same pretences found the multitude ready to join themselves unto them. *Antiq. lib. 20. c. 6. & 7. & de Bello Iudaico lib. 7. c. 31.* As did also *Barchosbas* in the reign of *Adrian the Roman Emperour*. And what *Maimonides* delivers of the doctrine of the *Jews* concerning this matter, might give any man an handle to offer at it. For, saith he, the *Messias* is not to be known by Signs or Wonders (for he is to work none) but only by Conquest. And therefore his Words are: *If there ariseth a King of the House of David, who is studious of the Law, and diligent in observing the precepts of it, as was David his father, that is, not only of the Law, which is written, but of the Oral also, and inclineth all Israel to walk therein, and repairs the breaches, and fights the battles of the Lord, this person may be presumed to be the Messias. But if he prospers in what he undertakes, and subdues all the neighbouring Nations round about him, and re-builds the sanctuary in its former place, and gathers together the dispersed of Israel, then he is for certain the Messias.* *Maimonides in Yad Hachazakah Tract. de Regibus & Bellis eorum, c. 11. §. 4.*

Doctrines

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Doctrines concerning the *Messias*, as were not only without all manner of worldly interest in them, but all levelled directly opposite thereto. For he taught them, that the *Kingdom* of the *Messias* was not a *Temporal*, but a *Spiritual Kingdom*; that he was not to be a Judge and a Ruler over them in the Secular affairs of this World, and the pomp and glory thereof, but to govern and direct their hearts within by the power of his holy Spirit, in order to conform them to that Law of Righteousness, which might fit them to reign with him in the Kingdom of everlasting Glory hereafter. And therefore when the *Jews*, being convinced by his wonderfull Works, that he was the *Messias*, would have taken him by force and made him their *King*, he withdrew from among them to disappoint the design. And when interrogated by *Pilate*, he told him his *Kingdom* was not of this World. And had he aimed at any such thing, he would never have taught such Doctrines of himself, which so directly overthrew all that which gave him the most favourable advantage of attaining thereto. Had he offered at more of this World's interest than the *Notions* of the *Jews* invested him with (if it were possible more could be had than those gave

gave their *Messias*;) or if he had joined thereto, the enjoyment of carnal pleasure, as *Mahomet* did, there might then have been some ground of charging him of differing from those Notions for the serving of his own interest ; but when the change was on the quite contrary hand, and instead of being that reigning and glorious *Messias*, amidst the highest pomp and splendour of this World, as the *Jews* would have had him to be, he declared himself only for such a *Kingdom*, as had nothing of this World in it, and whose greatest perfection lay in its greatest opposition thereto ; he that will say that there was any thing of this World in his thus stripping himself of all the pomp and glory of it, or that there could be any design of interest for himself, where all manner of self-interest is thus renounced, must reconcile contradictions, and make the nature of one extreme to consist in the other, which is most directly opposite thereto. Had he, when he took upon him to be the *Messias*, done it only for a worldly interest, this great interest of reigning, so obviously offered it self unto him under that character, that it cannot be conceived how he shou'd ever have avoided it. The power, and glory, and
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riches of a *Kingdom*, are too great baits of allurement to the worldly-minded Man, ever to be refused by such an one, after he had assumed that character, which in the generally-received Notion of it, invested him with them. Or can it be imagined, since these are the only things which could make that character at all desirable to an *Impostor*, why any Man should run the great hazard and trouble of being such in the assuming of it, but for the sake of them? All those false *Christ's*, who have been real *Impostors*, and have in several Ages started up to delude the World with this pretence, have ever with the name of the *Messias*, claimed also this *Kingdom*, which the *Jews* ascribed thereto; and that in every such scene of deceit, which hath opened in the World, hath always appeared to have been the bait, which allured those wretches to act that part therein. And had our *Saviour* been such an one as they, he must certainly have taken the same course. For to do otherwise, would have been to do the wickedness without the temptation, and to run the hazard without that which was to reward the success. But he having been so far herefrom, that he did not only renounce this *Kingdom*, but
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all manner of other worldly interest whatever ; this plainly shews he could have no design upon this World by that *Mission* which he undertook , or had any other reason for his entering on it as the *Messias*, but that he was really that person, whom *God* by his holy *Prophets* had so often promised, and at length, in fulness of time, accordingly sent to bring life and salvation unto us.

2. Had our *Saviour*, when he took upon him to be the *Messias*, done it only as an *Impostor* for a Secular interest, he would have assumed that character according to those notions in which the *Jews* expected him, because this would have been the readiest and most likely way for him to carry that interest, whatever you may suppose it to be. For the eager expectations of that People being then for such a reigning *Messias*, as they had drawn a Picture of in their own fancies, his only way to have gotten them to own and receive him for the *Messias*, was for him exactly to have humour'd them herein, and proposed himself to them just such an one as they would have had him to be. And had his intent been only to seduce them under that character, in order to serve himself of them for a Secular in-

terest, this method is that which is so obviously necessary in such a case, that it could not have been avoided. For to do otherwise, would evidently have been to put the matter in a most certain method totally to miscarry, and make the whole design impracticable. To come to them as their *Messias*, under a character totally differing from that in which they expected him, would be sufficient to make them, for that very reason, never to receive him. Although humility and the debasing of a Man's self, may in other cases be a means to court Popularity, and procure the favour of the People, it could never have served in this; nor would our *Saviour's* taking upon him the Character of the *Messias*, so vastly lower as to this World, than the general opinion then gave it unto him, have been of any stead to him in order thereto; but quite the contrary. For the *Jews* had then framed their notions of the *Messias* they expected, for their own sakes rather than his, suitable to those worldly interests they were most in love with, and those notions went currant through the whole *Nation*, as the true and exact description of him, by which he was to be known at his coming: And therefore for any one to propose himself

himself to them, as the *Messias*, under a character totally disagreeing herefrom, would have been the readiest way for him to be told, that he was not therefore the Man; and this, instead of being a means to seduce them to him, become such a reason for their rejecting him, as no art of *Imposture* would ever have been able to master. And this indeed proved the main cause, that notwithstanding our Saviour's Miracles, the *Jews*, who daily saw them, were still hardened in their aversion against him; and it continues with them to this day the grand stumbling-block of Infidelity, which they cannot get over. For they looked for a *Messias*, that was to subdue their Enemies, and deliver them from the slavery of the *Romans*, and by the establishment of a *Temporal Kingdom* over them advance the state of their *Nation* to the highest prosperity, and their *Law* to the highest perfection of observance, which both were capable of. But he proposed himself unto them as a *Messias*, which had nothing to do with this World, or any of the interests of it; and instead of the *Temporal Kingdom* they expected, claimed only a *Spiritual*; and instead of the outward Rites and Ceremonies of the *Mosaical Law*,

which were all fulfill'd and done away in him, taught them only to worship *God* in spirit and in truth. And what could more displease and alienate from him, Men so eager upon this World, and the g'ory and riches of it, than thus instead of conquest over enemies, extent of power, and a most flourishing state of prosperity, which they dreamt of, to preach to them of Mortification, Repentance, Self-denial, and those other *Christian* Virtues, in the encrease of which the true prosperity of *Christ's Kingdom* only consists; and instead of their *Temple*, and the outward pomp and splendour of the Worship there performed, which they so much valued themselves upon, and so zealously affected, thus to propose to them the Worshipping of *God* without all this, only in that Spiritual manner, which under the numerous Rites of the *Mosaical Law* they had not been accustomed to have any great regard unto? For this was to baulk them of the hopes they most delighted in, and put a baffle upon them in those eager expectations and most earnest desires which their hearts had long dwelt upon. And how ill they were able to brook this, will appear by this instance in the *Gospel**¹, That those very same Men, who

* Joh. c. 6.

who, on the seeing of his *Miracles*, were so firmly convinced of his being the *Messias*, that they would forthwith have taken him by force, and declared him their *King*, the next day after, on his preaching to them of spiritual things, and offering thereby to withdraw their minds from the perishable things of this World, to fix them on those which endure to everlasting life, murmured against him, and would no more endure him. For their hearts were after a *Messias*, that should found them a *Temporal Kingdom*, and make them great, and glorious, and powerfull therein; and to set up a *Spiritual Kingdom* instead hereof, was not only to deprive himself of the grandure of the other, but them also of the portion which they expected therein. And no one certainly that intended a worldly interest by such an undertaking, would ever have projected it in such a method as this, which was so totally inconsistent with it. For this would be to renounce in the very act the end which he proposed, and make the attainment of it impracticable by the very means whereby he pursued it; It would be to wave the highest interest in this World to pursue after another, which no one can imagine what, and thereby totally alien-

alienate those from him, by whom alone he could hope in such a design as this to attain any at all. And therefore had a worldly end and a worldly interest been all that our *Saviour* aimed at in his taking upon him to be the *Messias*, whom the *Jews* expected, he would never so much contrary to that interest, and so much contrary to that most obvious means of carrying on such a design, have assumed that character in a manner so much differing from that, under which they expected him; Or could he by such a method of procedure ever have made any thing of the attempt among them, had he not on his side the power of God, as well as his Mission, to make him successfull therein?

Had his business only been to deceive the People for the advancing of some secular interest of his own, he would never have attempted it in so unlikely a way of succeeding, as that of abolishing the *Mosaical Law*, to which the whole nation of the *Jews* were then so zealously addicted, that they could not bear the least word, which might seem to derogate either from the excellency, which they conceived of it, or that opinion which they then had, and still retain, that it was

was to be immutably observed by them to the end of the World. The case of *Mahomet* with his Men of *Mecca* was quite otherwise, he found no such zeal in them for their old *Religion* to struggle with, they themselves were then grown so weary of it, that the generality of them had in a manner totally exchanged it for no *Religion* at all at that time *Mahomet* first began to propagate his *Imposture* among them, they having then for the most part given themselves up to the opinions of the *Zendikees*, who in the same manner as the *Epicureans* among the *Greeks*, and too many now-a-days among us, acknowledged the Being of a *God*, but denying his Providence, the immortality of the soul, and a future state, did at the same time deny all manner of necessity of paying any worship unto him. And no wonder then if such Men, who placed their All in this World, were easily brought over to a *Sect*, whose chief aim was at worldly prosperity and worldly pleasure in the *Religion* which they professed. This *Mahomet* was well enough aware of before he started his new *Religion* among them, and it seems to have been the greatest encouragement which emboldned him to venture on that attempt.

tempt. However since they still retained the outward form of their *Religion* after they had deserted the substance of it, he found even from hence that opposition to his design, that to make it go down, he was forced to retain all those Rites and Ceremonies in his new *Religion*, which they had been afore used to in their old ; and in order hereto he chose to make some dangerous alterations in his first establishments, as particularly in that of the *Kebla*, rather than ruffle his *Arabians* by abolishing what he found them through long usage and custom any way affected to. For his business being to deceive the people, his care was to offer at nothing, which might be difficult to go down with them, and so must it be of every other deceiver who takes upon him to act the like part. But in every particular it was quite otherwise with our *Saviour*, and those whom he first preached his *Gospel* unto. For the *Jews* having undergone several terrible scourges from the hand of *God* for the neglect of that *Law* which he had given them, were from their former too much disregard of it then grown into the contrary extreme of being with exceeding superstition and bigotry too much devoted to it. They then looked on it with
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the same veneration, as they still do, to be an immutable Law never to be altered, That the *Messias* himself on his coming should not make the least change therein, but that the glory of his *Kingdom* should chiefly consist in the perfection of its observance, and the exact performance of the worship it prescrib'd, and for any one to advance any doctrine contrary hereto was reckoned no less than (*) *Blasphemy* (*) A& 6.v.13 among them. And therefore had our *Saviour* only consulted flesh and blood in the *Mission* which he undertook, had he had no other design therein than a Secular interest and a worldly end, he would never have opposed himself against the violent current of such predominant opinions, as he found then reigning among them, whom he first preached his *Gospel* unto, or ever durst have offered at the abolition of that *Law*, which they were so violently bigotted unto. Had he come to deceive them as a *Seducer*, the very nature of the thing must necessarily have directed him to a quite contrary method; that is, to footh and colleague with them whom he came to impose upon; to have contradicted no opinion they were violent for, or opposed any doctrine which they were zealously affected to, but to have

have studied their humours, and learnt their notions, and so framed and suited all his doctrines according thereto, as might best take to draw them over to the end designed. To have done otherwise would have been to set Priest and People against him, as an enemy to their Religion, and a Blasphemer of their *Law*. And, as our *Saviour* found it so in the result, so it must have been obvious to any one in his case to have foreseen it from the beginning. And therefore since notwithstanding this he took this method so contrary to the whole end and design of one that intends a cheat upon the people, and to without having any regard to that zeal with which the *Jews* were then so violently bigotted to their *Law*, or that rage of resentment, which they were ready to express against whatsoever in the least should derogate from it, did boldly preach unto them such Doctrines, as totally disannull'd it, this manifestly proves he could have no interest of his own to serve upon them in this undertaking, or that he had any other reason for his entering on it, but that he was sent of *God* so to do.

The grand and fundamental doctrine of the *Religion*, which *Jesus Christ* left his

their his *Church*, was that of his death and passion whereby he made atonement for our best sins and delivered us from the punishment which was due unto us for them. By this means only he proposed to save us, that is from Sin, the Devil, and eternal Death, and by this conflict only did he undertake to subdue these our enemies so it for us, and on that conquest to found us in his *Kingdom*, which should make us holy and righteous here, and for ever blessed stand with him in glory hereafter. This was contrary the whole end and purpose of our Saviour's Mission; this he frequently foretold and to his *Disciples*, and on this was founded zeal the whole *Religion* which he taught them. And can any one say he could have a design of Secular interest for himself in such a *Religion* as this, which could have no least being, but by his dying for it, or any such reason for its establishment among men till he had laid down his life for the com- pleting of it? To say there was any serving thing of worldly interest in this would be that to charge it on his cross, and place it in ring that bitter and ignominious death which he underwent thereon. Men sometimes put their lives to great hazard for the interests of this World, but for a Man left purposely to design death for such an end and his

and part with this World in such a manner as *Christ* did for the sake of any thing that this world hath, is a thing which was never yet heard of, and is in it self so contrary to the most obvious dictates both of reason and nature, that no one can be so absurd as to imagine it possible for any man so to do.

But that which I know you will say in this case is, That it was not *Christ* himself, but his Disciples after his death, that made this a part of his *Religion*; That he intended no such thing in the undertaking he entered on; that it should end in his Death, and be compleated by his Crucifixion; but that this hapning unto him, those who kept up his Party, and propagated his Religion after him, foisted this thereinto, to salve the ignominy of his Death, and serve themselves of it, for the better carrying on of their designs thereby. And if so, then the *Imposture* must be shifted from him to his *Disciples*; and in this case the same inquiry must still be made, What advantage could they propose to themselves herefrom? For if *Christ's* having no self-design or worldly-interest in the *Religion*, which he taught, be of any force to acquit him of being guilty of *Imposture* therein (as it must with

with every Man of unprejudiced reason,) it must also be of force to acquit them of the same charge who propagated it after him. And what worldly interest is it which they could possibly have in this matter? If you say *Empire*, how improbable is it, that a few poor *Fishermen* without any manner of foundation either of power, riches or interest with others, for the carrying on of such a design, should ever frame in their thoughts the least imagination tending thereto, especially at that time when the *Roman Empire* being in its utmost height and vigour had the major part of the then known World united under its command to crush the greatest attempts of this nature, which might be made against it? If riches and honour be alledged as their end, I must desire you to tell me, how this could be a means to gain them? or whether any one of them ever attained to either thereby? If we examine into the accounts, which we have of their lives and actions, we shall find them journeying about the world from place to place in great poverty and under all the difficulties and pressures of it to discharge that *Apostleship*, which was committed unto them, and in every place where they came to be load-

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ed with contempt, oppression and persecution for the sake of that *Religion* which they taught. Had riches and honour been the end proposed for all this, certainly after having experienced by the ill success, how improper means they had taken in order thereto, some of them would have desisted from the enterprize, and no longer have pursued a design, which could not answer its end. But you cannot bring us an instance of any one of them that did this. No, they still went on in the work, which they had undertaken, and without being wearied by the poverty they laboured under, or in the least discouraged by that contempt, scorn and persecution, which they every-where met with, all constantly persevered to preach that *Gospel*, which they had received, even to their lives end; and not only so but most of them laid down their lives for the sake thereof, which they would never have done, if they had not for that *Ministry* a much higher reason, than all the honour and riches of this world could ever amount unto. All that can be said of any worldly interest for them in their preaching up that *Religion* which they propagated is, That they were thereby made Heads of the Party which they drew over

over thereto. But alas, what advantage could this be unto them to be thus made Heads of a contemned, oppressed and persecuted Party of Men, who were everywhere sought out for bonds, imprisonments and death? To head such a Party, what is it, but to expose a Man's self to the greater danger, and set himself up to receive the first strokes of every persecution, which was levelled against it? For in this case, those who head the Party are most sought after, and the ring-leaders of it are ever made the first and the most signal examples of every severity, which is designed for its oppression. And this was all that the *Apostles* got by heading that Party, which they converted to the *Christian Religion*; and what of worldly interest could be found therein? If the heading of a Party be of any advantage to a Man, it must be then only when it brings him honour, or power, or riches, or some other worldly enjoyment. But to head such a Party, as the first *Christians* were, could bring neither of these therewith; but on the contrary, poverty, contempt, oppressions, and persecutions were all the fruits, as to this world, which the *Apostles* of our *Saviour* reaped thereby. And certainly on these terms, to head a

Party, could never have been the reason to make them enter on that undertaking; or if it had, they could never under such discouragements have long continued therein.

S E C T. II.

II. And thus far having examined the first mark of *Imposture*, and I hope sufficiently shown it cannot belong to that holy *Religion*, which we profess, I shall now proceed to the second, that is that it must always have wicked men for the *Authors* of it. For thus to impose upon mankind a false *Religion* is the worst of cheats, and the highest injustice which can be done either to God or Man; to God, because it robs him of the worship of his Creatures, either by diverting it to a false object, or by directing it to him in such a false way, as cannot be accepted of before him; And to Man, because it deprives him of his God, by putting him upon such a false *Religion* as must necessarily alienate both his mercy and his favour from him. And to do this is such a consummate piece of iniquity, that it is impossible any one can arrive thereto without having first corrupted himself to a great degree in all things
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else. For such an one must have cast off all fear of God, as well as all regard of Man, before he could ever offer at so great a Wickedness against both. And when a Man is come to this, to be sure he will stick at nothing, whereby his lusts may be gratified, or any carnal interest serv'd which he sets his heart upon, but will make the corruptions of his mind appear in all the actions of his life, and be thoroughly wicked in every thing where his own interest, or his own designs do not put a restraint upon him. And that *Mahomet* was such an one the *History* of his life which I have laid before you sufficiently shows.

But whoever yet charged * *Jesus Christ*, or his holy *Apostles* with any thing like this? not *Celsus*, not *Porphyry*, not *Julian* or any other of the *Heathens*, or the *Jews* who were the bitterest enemies of *Christianity* and the greatest opposers of it. And to be sure could they have found any such accusation against any of them, they would never have spared to have made the utmost use of it they could for the blasting

* All that the bitterest enemies of *Christianity* have ever objected against our *Saviour*, save a fabulous story of his Birth, amounts to no more than this, That he was a *Magician*, which was an invention, framed only to save his working of *Miracles* (which they could not deny) in such a manner as to make them give no reputation or authority to the doctrines which he taught.

of that *Religion*, which they taught. For it is a popular *Argument*, which would have served their purpose among the people more than any other they could have offered unto them. And we see with what success the various *Sects* among us serve themselves of it every day, no argument being more prevalent amongst the unthinking Multitude for the beating down the reputation of any profession of *Religion*, than the ripping up of the faults of those that teach it. To examine into all the Labyrinths and abstruse speculations of reason and argument, which may be brought for or against any *Religion*, is an opnose businels, which all have not capacities for, and few care to attend to. But of Good and Evil every Man is judge, and where they find the Teachers of any *Religion* to be wicked and naught, it is an inference which they are all apt too precipitately to run into, that the *Religion* must be naught also, and without any further examining into it condemn it so to be. And I find there is nothing, which you your selves are more greedy to lay hold of for an argument against our holy *Christian Religion*, than the faults which you observe in some of our *Ministers*, whose businels it is to promote it. And therefore

fore if the faults of the present teachers of *Christianity* be apt thus to afford so popular and prevalent an argument against it, how much more would the faults of the first founders and propagaters of it have done so, had there been any such to object against them? And had there been any such, so keen and searching Adversaries, would never have suffered the discovery to have escaped them, or ever fail'd to have objected it for the serving of their turn to the utmost they were able; and it can be owing to nothing, but their most unblameable innocence, that they have been secured herefrom. To say that they could not have that knowledge of their lives and actions, as was sufficient for them to discern their faults, and observe their mis-carriages, will not solve the matter. Though *Mahomet* acted his *Imposture* so many hundred miles within the remoter parts of *Arabia*, among a people, who by vast deserts were in a manner cut off from the converse of the rest of mankind, where very few or none of any other nation ever came to spy out his actions or observe his doings, and where he had none else to be witnesses of them, but those only who all embraced his forgery, and became

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zealously addicted to it; yet all this could not serve to conceal his faults, or hide his monstrous wickednesses from being observed and recorded against him. The foregoing *History* gives you a large Catalogue of them, and they are vouched by the authority of some of the most authentick writers of his own *Sect*. But *Christianity* had not its birth in such an obscure hole, nor did the first *Founder* of it, or those who propagated it after him, make their first appearance among such rude and illiterate *Barbarians*, as that *Impostor* did: but on one of the openest stages in the world, at *Jerusalem*, and in the Land of *Judea*, and not in an age, when as formerly that *Nation* separated it self from all others, and had no converse with any but themselves; but when they had scattered themselves abroad and mingled with all other Nations, and also were forced to admit all other Nations to mingle with them by being made a Province of the *Roman Empire*, which brought not only *Souldiers* and *MERCHANTS* of other Nations among them, but also opened the gate to all others, as they should think fit, to come and reside among them: And the *Temple* at *Jerusalem* being that, where all of the *Jewish Religion* worshipped:

ped; this constantly brought thither from all Nations those who professed it, which made a very great resort thither from all Parts of the World, especially at their three great *Festivals*. And therefore just after our *Saviour's* sufferings at the time of *Pentecost* next following, we are told that there were then at *Jerusalem* (*) *Par-* ^{(*) Acts 2.}
thians, Medes, and Elamites, and the dwel-
^{v. 9, 10, 11.}
lers of Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus,
Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya,
and Cyrene, with the Strangers of Rome,
Crete, and Arabians. So that to be sure nothing could be hid or concealed, which was done in so open a stage of the World, and in the sight of so many Nations as were then present upon it; nor is it possible, if those who then first delivered the *Chris- tian Religion* to the World, had been such wicked persons, as *Mahomet* was, and all other *Impostors* must be, it could ever have escaped their observation. And if it had at *Jerusalem*, there were other occasions enough given for a fuller discovery afterwards. For the holy *Apostles*, after our *Saviour's* death, did not confine themselves to *Jerusalem* and the Land of *Judaea* only, but dispersed themselves throughout the whole Earth, and at *Rome*, at *Athens*, and in many other celebrated Cities

Cities appeared openly, teaching the *Religion* which they had received, and forming *Churches* of those whom they had converted thereto, and thereby exposing their Lives and Actions publickly to the view of the whole World, made all Mankind in a manner witnesses of what they did. And *Christianity* was not such an acceptable thing to the World, as to move the Men of it to be so candid and good-natur'd to the first Authors of it, as to conceal their faults and hide their wickednesses, had there been any such in them. No, it was that which was against the lusts and pleasures, and the other evil courses of this World, more, than any other *Religion*, which was ever taught therein; and this put the World as much against it, and all that adhered thereto; and therefore we find them to be a Party of Men not only every-where spoken against, but also every-where hated, opposed, and persecuted to the utmost. And when so general an Odium was risen against them, and both *Jews* and *Gentiles* conspired together therein, to be sure there were not wanting abundance that made it their busines to pry into their actions, and examine their practices with all that spight, unfairenes, and ill interpretation

pretation of things, as is usual in such cases. And could they by all this search, inquiry and strict observation, have found any thing to charge upon Christ or his Apostles, which might cast a blot upon the Religion which they taught, to be sure we should have heard enough of it. For those who propagated their Odium against this holy Religion to the next succeeding Ages, to that excessive degree, in which the Primitive Christians experienced it in those terrible Persecutions which they underwent for three hundred years together, would certainly have propagated therewith all the Accusations they were able against those who were the first Founders and Teachers of it. And, to be sure, when (*) Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, and other bitter Opposers of Christianity, as well Jews as Heathens, took Pen in hand to write against it, we should have been told enough of it. But nothing of this appearing in any of their Writings, or any of the least

The main things which Celsus and Julian objected in their books against the Christian Religion are preserved in the Anwers which Origin wrote to the former and St. Cyril of Alexandria to the latter, but the books themselves are perished, as are also those of Porphyry written by him in fifteen Tomes on the same Argument for they being full of virulent Blasphemies Theodosius the Emperour by a Law caused them every-where to be burnt, and destroyed; but a great many remains and fragments of them are still preserved in the Works of Eusebius, and something of him also in St. Hierom in *Praefatione ad lib. 1. Comment. in Epist. ad Galatas.* Celsus lived in the second, Porphyry in the third, and Julian in the fourth Century after Christ.

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memorial of it being to be found in any Record whatsoever against them ; this manifestly proves that they are even in the judgment of their bitterest Enemies, totally free of this charge, and consequently being just and righteous persons,

(and of Christ and St. James, one of his Apostles (*) Josephus, though a Jew, particularly attests, that they were so) they could never be guilty of so great a wickedness both against God and Man, as to have imposed a cheat upon us in that Religion, which they delivered unto us.

(*) His words of our Saviour are, that he was a wise man (a title not given in those days but to such as were also good) and that he was a worker of Miracles, and a teacher of Truth, lib 18. c. 4. And of James he hath these words. These things (i. e. the destruction of Jerusalem, and the calamities that attended it) fell by way of just vengeance upon the Jews for James the Just, who was the Brother of Jesus called Christ, because the Jews had murdered him, being a most righteous Man. It must be acknowledged that this passage is not now extant in Josephus, but it is quoted by Eusebius in the Second Book of his Ecclesiastical History, c. 23. and also by Origen in his Second Book against Celsus, which would never have been done by them, had it not been extant in the Copies of his Works, which were then in use, however it came to be omitted since. For to have falsely alledged such a testimony to the enemies of Christianity, especially to one so acute and sharp as Celsus was, would have given them too great an advantage against it. But what is still extant in Josephus, amounts to the same thing ; for speaking of his being put to death by Ananias the High-Priest, Antig. lib. 20. c. 8. he says, That all good men were offended at it ; which sufficiently expresseth him to be a good man also. For why else should they be so concerned for him ?

S E C T. III.

III. And if they had been such wicked persons, as thus to have imposed upon us a false *Religion* for their own interest, both their wickedness and the interest, which they drove at, must necessarily have appeared in the very contexture of the *Religion* it self, and the Books of the *New Testament*, in which it is contained, would have as evidently proved both these against them, as the *Alcoran* doth against *Mahomet*; every Chapter of which yieldeth us manifest proofs both of the wicked affections of the Man, and the self-ends which he drove at for the gratifying of them.

For, first, when a Man proposeth an end of self-interest, and invents a new *Religion*, and writes a new *Law* on purpose for the obtaining of it, it's impossible, but that this End must appear in the Means, and the *Imposture*, which was invented of purpose to promote it, must discover what it is. For in this case the new *Religion* and the new *Law* must be calculated for this End, and be all formed and contrived in order thereto, otherwise it can have no efficiency for the obtaining

ing of it, nor at all answer the purpose of the inventor for the compassing of what he proposed ; and if it be thus calculated, ordered and contrived for such an End, that End cannot but be seen and discovered in those Means. For the End and Means prove each other ; that is, as the nature of the End proposed shows us what Means must be made use of for the obtaining of it, so do the nature of the Means which we use, discover what is the End which they drive at. And as far as the Means have a tendency to the End, so much must they have of that End in them ; and it is not possible for him that useth the one, long to conceal the other. And therefore nothing is more obvious and common among us than by the courses which a man takes to discern the end which he would have. As *Mahomet* invented his new *Religion* to promote his own ends, so the *Alcoran* in which it is contained sufficiently proves it, there being scarce a leaf in that Book which doth not lay down some particulars, which tend to the gratifying either of the ambition or the lust of that Monster who contrived it. And had the first Founder of our holy *Christian Religion*, or they who were the first propagators of it any

any such end therein, the Books of the *New Testament*, in which it is written, would have as palpably shown it. But here we challenge all the enemies of our *Faith* to use their utmost skill to make any such discovery in them. They have already gone through the strict scrutiny of many ages, as well as of all manner of adversaries, and none have ever yet been able to tax them herewith. For instead of being calculated for the interest of this World their whole design is to withdraw our hearts from it, and fix them upon the interest of that which is to come. And therefore the doctrines which they inculcate are those of mortification, repentance and self-denial, which speak not unto us of fighting, bloodshed, and conquest, as the *Alcoran* doth, for the advancing of a temporal *Kingdom*, but that renouncing all the pomps, and vanities, and lusts of this present World, we live soberly, righteously, and godly in the presence of him that made us, and instead of pursuing after the perishable things of this life, we set our hearts only on those Heavenly riches, which will make us great, and glorious, and blessed forever hereafter. For as the *Kingdom of Christ* is not of this World, so neither do those *Books*, in which are written

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written the *Laws* of this Kingdom, favour any thing thereof. The *Mammon* of this World, and the Righteousness which they prescribe us, are declared in them to be totally inconsistent. The *Old Testament* indeed, as being under the Dispensation of carnal Ordinances, which were the shadows only of those things after to come under the *Gospel*, treated with Men suitably thereto. And therefore we find much of this World both by way of promise as well as threat to be proposed therein. But it is quite otherwise with the *New*; For in that Revelation being given to the perfecting of righteousness, all things were advanced thereby from Earth to Heaven and from flesh to spirit. And therefore as the whole end of it is to make men spiritual, so are we directed thereby to look only to spiritual and heavenly Blessings for the reward hereof. Had our Saviour proposed victory, or riches, or carnal pleasures to his followers, as *Mahomet* did, then indeed his *Law* would have sufficiently favour'd of this World to make Men suspect, that he aimed at nothing else thereby. But he was so far herefrom that instead of this the whole tenour of his doctrine runs the quite contrary way, we being told of nothing else through the whole

whole *New Testament*, but of tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions, which shall attend all such as to this World who faithfully set their hearts to become his Disciples, and the experience of all ages since hath sufficiently verified the prediction. And indeed the very *Religion*, which he hath taught us, is of that holiness, that according to the course of this wicked World it naturally leads us thereinto. And how then can it be said, that any thing of worldly interest can be contained either in this *Religion*, or those holy Books in which it is written?

I cannot deny, that there are some Men so crafty and cunning in pursuing their interest, that it shall not easily be discerned in the Means what it is which they drive at for their End. But how great a compass soever such may fetch about to the point which they aim at, or in what by and secret paths soever they make forward towards it, yet if the Means, which they make use of, have any tendency thither, they can never be so totally blended, but there will always appear in them enough of the End to make the discovery to any accurate observer, and at length when the plot grows ripe for Execution, and the designer begins to offer at the putting himself in possession of

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what he proposed (as all such designers must at last) the whole scene must then be laid open, and every one will be able to see thereinto. And therefore if you will have it that the Holy *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, who were the first penners of the *New Testament*, were such cunning and crafty men, as to be able thus artfully to conceal their designs in those Books, which you suppose they wrote of purpose to promote them (which cannot reasonably be imagin'd of men of their education and condition in the World, they being all, except St. *Paul* and St. *Luke*, of the meanest occupations among the people, and totally unlearned) yet if they contrived those Books with any tendency towards those designs (and it cannot be conceived how otherwise they could help forward to the obtaining of them) it is impossible, they could thus have passed thorough so many ages, and all the strict examinations of *Heathens*, *Jews*, *Atheists*, and all other Adversaries, who have so strenuously endeavoured to overthrow their authority, and no discovery be made hereof. For supposing at first under the mask of renouncing the world they might a while conceal their designs for the interest of it (which is the utmost you can say in this case,) yet this could not last long:

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long : For if this were all they designed by teaching that holy *Religion*, and writing those Books in which it is contained, sometime or other they must have put those designs in Execution, otherwise they would have been in vain laid ; sometime or other they must have endeavoured by them to obtain what they aimed at, otherwise the whole projection of them would have been to no purpose ; and if they ever did so (as to be sure they would, had this been their end) then, as it happens in all other stratagems of the like nature, with how much artifice soever they might conceal what they intended in the contrivance, all at last must have come out in the Execution, and when they began to put themselves in possession of the end they aimed at, or at least made any offer towards it, the whole cheat must then have been unmask'd, and every one would have been able to see into the depth thereof. But when did our *Saviour*, or any of his holy *Apologists* by virtue of any of those doctrines delivered down unto us in the Books of the *New Testament*, ever put themselves in possession of any such worldly interest ? or when did they ever make the least offer in order thereto ? Have any of the ancient enemies of our holy *Religion* (and it had bitter ones

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enough from the very beginning) ever recorded any such against them? or have any other ever since from any good authority, or any authority at all, ever been able to tax them herewith? or is it possible their names could have remained untainted of this charge amidst so many Adversaries, who have now for near Seventeen hundred years stood up in every age to oppose that holy *Religion* which they have delivered unto us, had they in the least been guilty hereof? Nay, hath it been as much as ever said of them, that they practised, as to this world, any otherwise than they taught, or ever dealt with the interests of it in any other manner, than totally to renounce them? or had they at all any other portion in this life, than that of persecution, affliction, and tribulation as it is foretold in those holy Books that they should? And what then can be a greater madness, than to suppose that men should lay such a deep design, as that of inventing a new *Religion*, and undergo all that vast trouble and danger, which they did, to impose it on the world for the sake of a worldly interest, and yet never put themselves in possession of that interest, or ever make the least offer towards it?

If you say that the whole end of the *Religion* was only to gain the party, and that

that the steps to the interest were to be made afterwards, I still go on to ask, who can tell us, after the party was gain'd, of any such steps that were ever made, or of any the least offer tending thereto? Were not the first *Christians* for many ages after the first founding of our faith, what they ought still to be, men that used this world as if they used it not, who lived in it without being of it, and did truly, what they vowed in their *Baptism*, renounce all the Pomps, and Vanities, and Lusts thereof, faithfully to observe that holy *Law* which they had receiv'd? And in this they persever'd so steadily, that even their very enemies admitted the righteousness of their lives, and (*) bore witness thereto, and the cruellest persecutors could never beat them therefrom, but they still went on in the observance of their holy *Religion* without having any other design therein, than to practise that righteousness which it taught, and for three hundred years together stood firm thereto against all those terrible

(*) *Plinii Epist. lib. 10. Ep. 97.* — *Hanc suisse summam vel cul-
pa sue vel erroris, quid essent soliti
statu die ante Lucem convenire,
carmenque Christo quasi Deo
dicere secum invicem seque Sacra-
mento non in scelus aliquod obfir-
gere, sed ne furtu, ne latrociniis,
ne adulteria committerent, ne fi-
dem fallerent, ne depositum appel-
lati abnegarent. In like man-
ner they were also vindicated by *Serenius Granianus*, Proconsul of *Asia*, in his Epistle to the Emperor *Adrian*. *Euseb. Hist. Ecclesiast. lib. 4. c. 8, & 9.* By *Antoninus Pius* in his Epistle to the Commons of *Asia*. *Justin Martyr Apol. 2.* and even by the Heathen Oracles themselves. *Euseb. in vita Constantini lib. 2. c. 50. & 51.**

storms of persecution which were risen against them, till at length by the holiness of their lives, and the constancy of their sufferings, they made a conquest over their very persecutors, and brought over the World unto them. And are not our Principles still the same, and also, thanks be to *God*, notwithstanding the Corruptions of the present age, the practice too of many thousands still among us, who I doubt not will be ready to undergo the same sufferings, those primitive *Christians* did, when ever *God* shall try them for that holy *Religion* which they profess, as they now are to observe the righteousness thereof. But supposing this had been all otherwise, and the *Mammon* of this World and not the Righteousness of *God* were really the end for which our *Religion* was designed, yet to renounce the World to gain a Party, and afterwards make use of this Party to gain the World, is a project so unfeasible, that the former part of it must necessarily have overthrown the latter, whenever it had been attempted. For when men had been drawn over to a party under the specious pretence of renouncing the World, and been instructed and firmly fixed in this principle, to make those very same men afterwards to serve their

their turn for the gaining of a worldly interest would be to make their doctrine and their practice so monstrously interfere, as must necessarily have broken all into pieces, and destroyed the whole design. Certainly, had they any such design, they would never have thus possessed their Disciples with such principles against it by the *Religion* which they taught them; and in that they did so I think nothing can be a more evident Demonstration, that they could never intend any such end thereby. *Mahomet* knew well enough, this was not a way to carry what he designed, and therefore openly owned in his *Religion*, what he aimed at thereby and made his *Law* to speak for that *Empire* and *Lust*, which he desired to enjoy, and so when he had made his *Religion* to obtain, he gained by virtue thereof the whole which he projected by it, and became possessed of the *Empire* of all *Arabia* for the gratifying of his *Ambition*, and as many Women as he pleased for the satisfying of his *Lust*, which were the two Ends he drove at in the whole Imposture. And had *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* any such design in the *Religion* which they taught, they must in the same manner have made their *Religion* speak

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for it, or else it could never have served their purpose for the obtaining of it. And if their *Religion* had ever offer'd at any such thing, it must necessarily have appeared in the Books in which it is written.

And 2dly. if they had been so wicked, as thus to impose upon the World a false *Religion* for the promoting of their own interest, as that interest must have appeared in the contexture of the *Religion* it self, and in those Books in which it is written, so also must their wickedness. For Words and Writings being the outward expressions of our inward conceptions, there is that connection between them, that although the former may often disguise the latter, they can never so totally conceal them, but every accurate observer may still be able through the one to penetrate into the other, and by what a man utters, whether in speech or writing, see what he is at the bottom, do what he can to prevent it. There are indeed some that can act the *Hypocrite* so cunningly, as to dissemble the greatest wickedness under words, writings and actions too that speak the quite contrary. But this always is such a force upon their inclinations, and so violent a bar upon their inward passions and desires, that nature will frequently break

break through in spight of all art, and even speak out the truth amidst the highest pretences to the contrary. And there is no *Hypocrite*, how cunningly soever he may act his part, but must this way very often betray himself. For wickedness being always uppermost in such a Man's thoughts, and ever pressing forward to break forth into expression, it will frequently have its vent in what that Man speaks, and in what he writes, do what he can to the contrary; the care, caution and cunning of no Man in this case being sufficient totally to prevent it. Furthermore, there is no Man thus wicked, that can have that knowledge of Righteousness, as thoroughly to act it under the Mask with that exactness, as he who is truly righteous, lives and speaks it in reality. His want of experience in the practice, must in this case lead him into a great many mistakes and blunders in the imitation. And this is a thing which generally happens to all that act a part, but never more than in matters of *Religion*, in which are many Particulars so peculiar to the Righteous, as none are able to reach them, but those only who are really such. And supposing there were any that could, yet there will ever

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be that difference between what is natural and what is artificial, and between that which is true, real and sincere, and that which is false, counterfeit and hypocritical, that nothing is more easie than for any one, that will attend it, to discern the one from the other. And therefore were *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* such persons as this charge of *Imposture* must suppose them to be, it's impossible, but that the *Doctrines* which they taught, and the Books which they wrote, must make the discovery; and the *New Testament* would, as a standing *Record* against them in this case, afford a multitude of instances to convict them hereof. That the *Alcoran* doth so as to *Mahomet*, nothing is more evident; a strain of Rapine, Bloodshed and Lust running thorough the whole Book, which plainly proves the *Author* of it to be altogether such a Man, as the charge of *Imposture* must necessarily suppose him to be. And were the first Founder of our holy *Religion*, or the Writers of those Books, in which its *Doctrines* are contained, such Men as he, both their *Doctrines* and their Books would as evidently prove it against them. But here I must again challenge you, and all other the Adversaries of our holy *Religion*,

ligion, to show us any one particular in it, that can give the least foundation to such a charge, any one word in all the Books of the *New Testament*, that can afford the least umbrage or pretence thereto. Let what is written in them be tried by that which is the Touchstone of all *Religions*, I mean that *Religion* of Nature and Reason, which *God* hath written in the hearts of every one of us from the first Creation; and if it varies from it in any one particular, if it prescribes any one thing, which may in the minutest circumstance thereof be contrary to its Righteousness; I will then acknowledge this to be an argument against us, strong enough to overthrow the whole Cause, and make all things else that can be said for it, totally ineffectual to its support. But it is so far from having any such flaw therein, that it is the perfectest *Law* of Righteousness, which was ever yet given unto Mankind, and both in commanding of Good, as well as in forbidding of Evil, vastly exceeds all others that went before it, and prescribes much more to our practice in both, than the wisest and highest Moralist was ever able without it to reach in speculation. For,

1st. As

1st. As to the forbidding of Evil, it is so far from indulging, or in the least allowing us in any practice that favours hereof, that it is the only *Law* which is so perfectly broad in the prohibition, as adequately to reach whatsoever may be Evil in the practice, and without any exception, omission, or defect, absolutely, fully, and thoroughly forbids unto us, whatsoever may have but the least taint of corruption therein ; and therefore it not only restrains all the Overt-acts of iniquity, but also every imagination of the heart within, which in the least tends thereto, and in its Precepts prohibits us not only the doing, or speaking of Evil, but also the harbouring or receiving into our Minds the least thought or desire thereafter, whereby it so effectually provides against all manner of iniquity, that it plucks it up out of every one of us by the very roots, and so makes the Man pure, and clean, and holy altogether, without allowing the least favour of Evil to be remaining in him ; and every one of us would be thoroughly such, could we be but as perfect in our Obedience to this *Law*, as it is perfectly given unto us. And,

2dly. As

2dly. As to the commanding of Good, its prescriptions are, That we employ our Time, our Powers, and all other Talents intrusted with us to the best we are able, both to give Glory unto *God*, and also to show Charity unto Men ; and this last not on'y to our Friends, Relations, and Benefactors, but in general to all Mankind, even to our Enemies, and those who despightfully use us and persecute us ; and hereby it advanceth us to that highth of perfection in all holiness and goodness, as to render us like the *Angels* of Light in our Service unto *God*, and like *God* himself in our Charity to Man. For it directs us in the same manner as the *Angels* to worship and serve our *God* to the utmost ability of our nature, and in the same manner as *God* to make our goodness to Men extend unto all without exception or reserve, as far as they are capable of receiving it from us.

And can any Man think it possible that a *Religion*, which so thoroughly and fully forbids all Evil, and in so high and perfect a manner prescribes us all Good, could ever be the product of a wicked mind ? The fruit is too good to proceed from so corrupt a root, and the effect vastly above the efficiency of such a cause ever to produce

duce it. For can it possibly be imagin'd, that a wicked Man could either have inclination to do so much for the promoting of that Righteousness, which all his passions and desires so violently run counter unto; or if he would, that such an one could ever be so well acquainted with all the ways thereof, as so exactly to prescribe them? If it be so difficult for such an one to conceal his inclinations in his expressions; if it be so hard for him, when he vents himself into Words or Writings, not to let loose something in them of what he really is (as I have already shown) how can any copy be drawn from such a Mind, but what must in some feature or other resemble the Original, or any thing at all proceed from thence, but what must carry with it some favour of the iniquity thereof? Set but such an one to write a Letter, and he will scarce be able to do it without putting so much of his passions and his temper into it, as that we may read from thence what he is, as every Man's experience may tell him, that corresponds with such; and how much more then may we be assured will he lay himself open, when he hath the large scope of a Book to express himself in, and especially when that book is of such a nature,

a nature, as gives him the fullest occasion, and the most inviting opportunity so to do? And what book can be more such, than that which is to propose a new *Law* to Mankind? In the writing of such a book, if ever, certainly the wicked Man will show himself, and in the same manner, as *Mahomet* did, conform his *Laws* to his own inclinations, and prescribe such rules of living to others, as may best justify him in those which he himself follows. And although he should not intend any such thing, though he should not design so to do (and it is hard to imagine of such a Man, that he should not) yet at least the prevailing bent of his passions, and the corruption of his judgment, which always follows therefrom, must necessarily lead him thereto, it being, morally speaking, altogether impossible; but that the wicked Man must appear in what the wicked Man doth, and the deeds, words, and writings which proceed from such an one, must in some measure favour of what he is. And therefore if there be nothing in the *Law* of our holy *Religion* (as I hope I have fully shown, that there is not) which can make the least discovery of any such thing, nothing that can afford the least pretence for such a charge against

against it, where so large a scope is given for it ; this sufficiently proves, that neither the first *Founder* of the *Christian Religion*, nor those who first wrote it in the Books of the *New Testament*, in which we now have it, could possibly be wicked Men, and consequently not such *Impostors*, as you would have them to be.

But here I know it will be objected, that there is no necessity, that all *Impostors* should be as wicked as *Mahomet* ; and therefore though *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* were no such wicked Persons, yet however they may be still *Impostors* for all that. For, first, it hath hapned that very just and good Men have had recourse to *Imposture* to bring to pass and establish their most commendable designs, as we have an instance in *Minos King of Crete*, and another in *Numa King of Rome*, both which, to give the greater authority to their *Laws*, pretended to have had them by *divine Revelation*. And, secondly, you will say, it's possible, a Man may be an *Impostor* by *Enthusiasm*, and mistake, and falsely impose things for *divine Revelation*, not out of a wicked design to deceive others, but that he is really deceived herein himself. And if in these two Cases a

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Man that is not wicked may be an *Impostor*, you will urge, That though *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* were not wicked Men; yet this will not prove them not to have been *Impostors*, because it's possible, that in one of these two Cases they might have been such.

In order to the clearing of the first of these Objections, I desire you would consider these Three following Particulars.

1. That in every *Religion* there are these two Parts to be observed, very distinct from each other. 1. The *Religion* it self; And, 2. The Means whereby it is promoted, and propagated among Men.

2. When the *Imposture* is only in the former of these two, and a true *Religion*, or at least one, that is really believed to be such, is promoted by means of *Imposture*; that is, by feigning a *divine Revelation*, where there is none, or by counterfeiting *Miracles*, or by any other such means tending to deceive Men thereinto; this amounts to no higher than a *pious fraud*, which out of an over-hot and inconsiderate zeal some Men have made use of for the promoting of the best Ends.

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And such Men, for the sake of such Ends, may still be denominated good and righteous in the main, how much soever they may have been out in making use of such means to promote them.

3. When the *Imposture* is in the End, as well as in the Means; and not only the *Revelation* pretended, but also the *Religion* it self is all false, counterfeit, and feigned; this amounts to such an *Imposture*, as is totally wicked without any mixture of good therein. In the former Case, where the *Imposture* is only in the Means, there is a good End designed, and therefore something still from whence the person using it may be denominated Good; but where the *Imposture* is in both, it is Wickedness all over, without any thing at all in it to exempt him from being perfectly wicked, that maketh use thereof.

Which Particulars being premised, my Answer to the Objection is as followeth.

(*) Plato in Minoe & in primo Dialogo de Legibus. Dionysius Halicarnassus, lib. 1. Strabo, lib. 16. Valerius Maximus, lib. 1. c. 2.

i. I do acknowledge it to be related by (*) Authors of good credit, that Minos King of Crete, when he first framed the *Laws* of his

his Country; to give them the greater authority, used to retire into a Cave on Mount *Dic̄a*, and from thence to bring them forth to his *Cretans*, as if they had been there delivered to him by *Jupiter*: And that *Numa*, when he founded the *Laws of Rome* (†), practised the same art, pretending to have received them from the Nymph *Egeria*, that so he might procure them to be received by the *Romans* with the greater veneration. And by this device they both obtained their End in bringing very rude and barbarous People to submit to those good Orders and Rules, which they prescribed for their living civilly, peaceably, and justly together. But this, although it were a fraud in the Means, yet as far as it related only to a political End, belongs to another matter, and doth not at all fall within that argument of *Religion*, which we are now treating of.

(†) Plutarchus
in vita Numæ
& Dionysius
Halicarnassæ.
us, lib. 1.

2. As to the *Laws of Numa*, I acknowledge that they reached not only Matters of State, but those of Religion also, and that the whole method of the old *Roman Religion* was regulated and stated by them; but that *Numa* founded any new *Religion*, is what I utterly deny. For *Numa* left no other *Religion* behind him in *Rome* at

his death, than that very same *Heathenism*, which he found there at his first coming thither to be *King*. For the City having been then but newly founded, and the People made up of a Collection of the refuse and scum of divers Nations there gathered together, they were as much out of order in matters of *Religion*, as in those belonging to the Civil Government, and all that *Numa* did, when he came to reign over them, was to make *Laws* to regulate both; and therefore, as he founded several wholesome Constitutions for the orderly governing of the State, so also did he for the regular worshipping of the *Gods* then acknowledged among them, without making any essential alteration in the *Religion* afore practised by them. For had he done so, then the *Religion* of the *Romans* must have differed from the *Religion* of the other Cities of *Italy*, which we find it did not. For they communicated with each other in their Worship, as they did also with the *Greeks*. And in truth the old *Roman Religion* was no other, than the *Greek Heathenism*, the same which was practised in *Greece*, and in all those Countries which were planted with Colonies from thence, as almost all *Italy* was at that time. And there-

therefore the *Romans*, as well as the rest of the Cities of *Italy*, looked on *Delphos* as a principal place of their worship with the same veneration that the *Greeks* did, and had frequent recourse thither on Religious accounts, as the *Roman Histories* on many occasions acquaint us. And this Religion *Numa*, while he lived among his *Sabines*, being accurately versed in, and also a diligent practitioner of it, on his coming to *Rome*, and finding the *Romans* all out of order in that little which they had of it (for during the Reign of *Romulus*, they minded little else but fighting, and therefore had not leisure, or perchance any great regard, for this matter) he not only instructed them more fully in it according as it was received in the Neighbouring Nations, but also framed several rules and constitutions for their more regular and orderly practice of it, which did no more make the old *Heathenism* of the *Romans* to be a new Religion, than the body of *Canons* given us by King *James* the First, for the more orderly regulating of our Worship and Discipline, makes our Religion a new *Christianity*. Only *Numa*, the better to make his Constitutions to obtain among those barbarous people for whom he made them, pretended to have been

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instructed in them by a divine Person ; and in this he practised a *pious fraud*, but was by no means guilty of such an *Imposture* as we are now treating of. For he taught them no new *Religion*, but only the very same *Greek Heathenism*, which he had received with the rest of the People of *Italy* from their forefathers, and really believed to be that very *true Religion*, whereby *God* was to be served, and therefore notwithstanding the deceit he made use of, he might from the end, which he proposed and which he really effected thereby to the civilizing of a very barbarous sort of people, be still reckoned a just and good Man ; and to give him his due, he really was one of the most excellent Personages of that age in which he lived, and first sowed among the *Romans* the seeds of that virtue, with which they so eminently signalized themselves for so many Ages after. But,

3. *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* took on them not only to be *Messengers* sent of *God*, but also to teach a *new Religion* to the World ; and therefore, if they were *Impostors*, they must be so in the largest and fullest sense, both in respect of the *Religion* it self, as well as the means whereby they promoted it. And in this case there

there could be nothing to excuse them from being altogether as wicked as I have alledged. Where the *Religion* is true, or really believed so to be, there is a pious intention in the end, which may speak some goodness in him that useth fraud to promote it; and such a goodness, as greatly exceeds the obliquity of the fault which he committed about it; and therefore, although he cannot on the account of the Good be excused from the Evil (for it is always a scandal to *Religion* to be promoted by *Falsehood*,) yet still he must be reckoned more commendable from the one than faulty from the other; and in this case there will still be room enough left from the goodness of the End designed and the Piety of the intention to denominate the Man good and righteous in the main, notwithstanding the fault committed in using such means to bring it to effect. But where the *Religion* is all *Forgery* and *Falsehood*, as well as the means of promoting it *deceit* and *fraud*, the *Imposture* then becomes so totally and perfectly wicked without the least mixture of good therein, as must necessarily denominate the Authors and first *Propagators* of it to be perfectly wicked also.

If you say, that such a perfect *Imposture* as this can have any good End, for the sake whereof the *Authors* of it may be freed from that charge of Wickedness which I lay upon them, that good End must be either the honour of *God*, or the benefit of Men. But how can *God* be more dishonoured, than by a *false Religion*? or how can Men be more mischiev'd than by having the practice of it imposed on them, whereby they must thus constantly dishonour, and consequently offend and lose the favour of him that made them? An *Imposture* in this case hath that aggravation from the object it is about, as well as from the perfection of iniquity which is in the act; that supposing it could be made productive of any good End, that good would be so vastly overbalanced by the Wickedness of the Means, that it would be of no weight in comparison thereof, or at all avail to the rendering of those, that shall make use of it, less wicked than I have said. But when a Man can thus far proceed in Wickedness towards *God*, as to be the Author of constant dishonour unto him in a *false Worship*; and towards Men, as to ensnare them into all that mischief, which must be consequential hereto; it must necessarily

rily imply such a thorough disregard of both, as every good intention in respect of either must be inconsistent with. And therefore, if it be possible that such a wicked *Imposture* can ever be made the Means to a good End, it is scarce to be conceived, how they who are so wicked, as to be the Authors of it, could ever intend any such good thereby.

But further, If the *Authors* of such an *Imposture*, as we are now treating of, can be less wicked, than I have said, on the account of any good, which you pretend they may design thereby, I desire to know, among what sort of Men you will place them, while you thus plead their excuse. For they must be one of those three; that is, either *Atheists*, *Deists*, or *Believers of an instituted Religion*.

1. If you say they are *Atheists*, that word alone contains enough to prove them perfectly wicked, whatever can be said to the contrary. It is indeed agreeable enough to the Principles of this sort of Men, that such an *Imposture*, as we are treating of, may laudably be made use of to a good End. For they hold, that all *Religion* is nothing else but a device of *Politicians* to keep the World in awe. But if

if the *Atheist* be the deviser, what intention of Good can the device carry therewith? None certainly towards *God*, since he utterly denies his Being; or can it in this case have any towards Men, since by denying him, for whose sake it is that we are to do good to others, he casts off therewith all the reason and obligation, which he hath, abstractive of his own interest, of doing any such at all. All the good therefore, that such an one can aim at, must totally center in himself to advance his own enjoyments and gratifie his own lusts in all those things which his corrupt affections carry him after; and to enjoy these without restraint of *Laws* or fear of punishment being that alone, which is the real and true cause that makes any Man deny that supreme and infinitely good and just Being, whom all things else prove; whoever is an *Atheist*, must be perfectly wicked before he can be such; and what is there which can, while in that impiety, ever give him a better character afterwards?

2. If you say they are *Deists*, such as you profess your selves to be, your main Principle is against all *instituted Religion* whatever, as if *God* were dishonoured, and Man injured by every thing of this nature

nature practised among us ; and can you then think, that any who are thus persuaded, can without being first corrupted to a great degree of Impiety, as well as Hypocrisie, ever become themselves so contrary to their own Sentiments, on any pretence whatsoever, the Authors and Teachers of such a *Religion* among us ?

3. But if you place them among those who are *Believers of an instituted Religion*, they must abolish that which they believe to be true, before they can introduce that by *Imposture* which they know to be false. And this must be the case of *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles*, if they were such *Impostors* as you hold them to be. For they were educated and brought up in the *Jewish Religion*, which they believed to be from *God*, and the whole Tenour of the *Religion* which they taught supposeth it so to be ; and that it was the only true way whereby *God* was to be worshipped by them, till they delivered their new *Revelations*, which totally abolished this *Religion*, and established the *Christian* in its stead ; and therefore if those *Revelations* were not true and real, as they pretended they were, but all forged and counterfeited by them, as you say, they must abolish a *Religion*, which they believed

lieved to be true, to make way for that, which they knew to be false, and thereby become wilfully and knowingly, according to their own belief, the *Authors* of leading Men from saving Truths, into damning Errors, to the utter destruction of their Souls for ever; and also of depriving *God* of that acceptable Worship, whereby he was truly honoured according to his own appointment, to introduce in its stead a false superstition of their own devising, which must be constant dishonour unto him as long as practised among us. And if *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* were such *Impostors*, as all this imports; and such they must be, if they were *Impostors* at all; they must be guilty of that impiety towards *God*, as well as that injustice towards Men herein, as must necessarily suppose them the wickedest of Men before they could arrive hereto; and therefore if they were not such wicked Men, this abundantly demonstrates, they could not be such *Impostors*, as you charge them to be.

As to the second Objection, That a Man may be an *Impostor* through *Enthusiasm* and Mistake, and falsely impose things for *divine Revelations*, not out of a wicked

a wicked design to deceive others, but that he is herein really deceived himself; and that therefore there is no necessity, that all *Impostors* should be such wicked persons, as I have alledged; my Answer here-to is,

1. I do acknowledge that *Enthusiasm* hath carried Men into very strange conceits and extravagancies upon the foundation of a *Religion* already established, as we have instances enough hereof in the

Anabaptists of Germany, the *Quakers* here with us, the (*) *Batenists* among the *Mahometans*, and in some of the *Recluses* of the *Church of Rome*. But that *Enthusiasm* could ever go so far, as to fansie a *divine Revelation* for the establishing of a *new Religion*, and upon such a fansie propagate that *Religion* in the World, as if it came from *God*, is that which I cannot believe; and there is no instance, that I know of, that can be given hereof. But,

2dly. Allowing it possible, this Objection then, as applied to the case in hand, must suppose *Jesus Christ*, and his *Apostles*, to have been deceived by *Enthusiasm*

(*) They were a sort of *Mahometan Enthusiasts* in the *East*, who followed the Light within them in the same manner as the *Quakers* with us, and therefore were called *Batenists* from the *Arabic* word *Batan*, *insiu*. And on this Principle did all the Villainies imaginable, pretending an impulse thereto from this Light *within* them.

stiasm into the *Religion* which they taught; and that therefore, although they were by no means such wicked Men, as a wilfull *Imposture* must suppose them to be, yet still they might be *Impostors* by mistake; and being by *Enthusiasm* so far deluded, as to think that to come to them from *God* by divine Revelation, which had no other birth, but from their own wild fancies, might preach it to Men as such, not out of a wicked design to deceive, but that they were really herein deceived themselves. But is it possible for any Man to conceive, that so grave, so serious, and so wisely a framed *Religion*, as *Christianity* is, could ever be the spawn of *Enthusiasm*? Whatsoever is the product of that, useth ever to be like the Parent, wild and extravagant in all its parts, often disagreeing with all manner of Reason, and often as much with it self. But *Christianity* is in all its parts as rational as it is good, giving us the justest Notions of *God*, the best Precepts of our duty towards Him, and the exactest Rules of living honestly and righteously with each other, and hath a thorough conformity to it self in every particular of it; on which account it hath been approved and admired for the excellency of its compoſure,

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sure, and the wisdom of its constitutions, even by the best and wisest of those who never submitted thereto; and therefore always carries with it Marks and Evidences enough in the very Nature of it, sufficiently to prove it vastly above the power of such a Cause ever to produce it.

3. The *Founder* and first *Teachers* of *Christianity* gave such evidences for the truth thereof, as *Enthusiasm* could never produce. For can *Enthusiasm* raise the dead to life again, cure all manner of diseases, and work such other Miracles, as Christ and his Apostles did? Had they by *Enthusiasm* been mistaken in the *Doctrines* which they taught, certainly *God* would never have wrought such wonderfull Works by their hands, as give testimony thereto.

4. Several of the principal *Articles* of our *Faith* depend upon such matters of fact, as allow no Room for *Enthusiasm* to take place in them; as that of the *Resurrection* of our *Saviour* from the dead, his *Ascension* into *Heaven*, and the *descent* of the *Holy Ghost* in the *gift of Tongues*. For in such things as these, which Men see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and feel with their hands (as one of the *Apostles* did the very Wounds of our *Savi-*

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our after his *Resurrection*) no *Enthusiasm* can ever lead Men into a mistake. For can it possibly be said that it was only by *Enthusiasm* that five hundred Men together saw *Christ* after he was risen again from the dead ? or that it was by *Enthusiasm* that his *Apostles* saw him ascend up into *Heaven* from *Mount Olivet* in the presence of them all at noon-day ? or that it was only by *Enthusiasm*, that the same *Apostles* on the day of *Pentecost* received the *gift of Tongues* by the *descent* of the *Holy Ghost* upon them , so as to be able to converse with all the several *Nations* then at *Jerusalem* in their own *Languages*, without ever having learned any thing of them ? To say that Men could any way be mistaken in such things as these, will be to deny the certainty of sense, and overthrow the foundations of all manner of knowledge whatever. It must therefore be said as to these particulars, as it must also of all the *Miracles* of our *Saviour*, which give *Testimony* to the *Doctrines* which he taught, That his *Apostles*, who testified them unto the *World*, and upon the credit of them built up that *Religion* which they delivered unto us, did either see them really done as they relate, or they did not see them.

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If they did see them, no *Enthusiasm* could ever make them be mistaken therein; and if they did not, they must be altogether as bad *Impostors*, as *Mahomet* himself in testifying them unto us; and what but as great Wickedness as his could ever induce them so to do?

S E C T. IV.

IV. The next Mark of an *Imposture* is, That it must unavoidably contain in it several palpable falsities, whereby may be made appear the falsity of all the rest. For whoever invents a Lye, can never do it so cunningly and knowingly, but still there will be some flaw or other left in it, which will expose it to a discovery; and no Man who frames an invention, can ever secure it herefrom without two qualifications, which no Man can have; and they are, 1st. A thorough knowledge of all manner of Truths; And, 2dly. Such an exact memory, as can bring them all present to his Mind, whenever there shall be an occasion. For to make the Lye pass without contradiction, he must make it put on a seeming agreement with all other Truths whatever. And how can any one do this without knowing all Truths,

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and having them also all ready and present in his mind to consider them in order thereto? And since no Man is sufficient for this, no Man is sufficient so to frame a Lye, but he will always put something or other into it, which will palpably prove it to be so. For if there be but any one known Truth in the whole scheme of Nature with which it interferes, this must make the discovery; and there is no Man that forgeth an *Imposture*, but makes himself liable this way to be convicted of it. This is the method whereby we distinguish supposititious Authors from those which are genuine, and fabulous Writers from true *Historians*. For there is always something in such, which disagrees from known Truths to make the discovery, some flaw always left in spite of the utmost care and foresight of the Forgerer, that betrays the cheat. Thus *Annius's Imposture* of his *Berosus*, *Manetho* and *Megasthenes* became detected, and so also we know the *Tuscan Antiquities* of *Inghiramius* to be a cheat of the like nature. And by the same rule is it that we receive *Sallust*, *Tacitus* and *Suetonius* for true *Historians*, and reject others as Writers of Fables, and of no authority with us: And if we examine the *Alcoran* of *Mahomet* by

by the same method, nothing can be more plainly convicted of *Falsity* and *Imposture*, than that must be by it. For although in that Book he allows both the *Old* and the *New Testament* to be of divine authority, yet in a multitude of instances he differs from both: I mean not in matters of *Law* and *Religion*, for here his design is to differ; but in matters of fact and history, which if once true, must evermore be the same. They have a fetch indeed to bring him off, by saying that the *Jews* and the *Christians* corrupted those holy Books, and therefore where he relates things otherwise than they do, he doth there restore Truth, and not vary from it. But certainly this will not hold, where, by a very gross blunder, he makes the *Virgin* (*) *Mary*, the Mother of our *Saviour*, to be the same with *Miriam*, the Sister of *Moses*. For this would be to put the *Gospel* so close upon the heels of the *Law*, as to allow no time for the taking

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(*) *Alcoran*, c. 3. where observe, that through all that Chapter in every place, where the *French*, and out of that the *English Translation* of the *Alcoran* hath *Joachim*, in the Original *Arabic* it is *Amran*, and from thence this Chapter in the Original is called *Surat'l Amran*, i. e. the Chapter of *Amran*. But in both these Translations it is called the Chapter of *Joachim*. For *Mahomet* mistaking the *Virgin Mary* to be the same with *Miriam*, the Sister of *Moses*, makes *Amran* to be her Father. But *Ryer*, the *French Translator*, very imprudently taking upon him to correct the *Impostor's* blunder, puts *Joachim* in the place of *Amran*, and thereby gives us a false Version, where it is very material in order to the exposing of that *Imposture* to know the true. And the *English Translator* follows him herein.

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place of this latter, before it would have been totally abolished by the former. But which most discovers his *Imposture*, are the monstrous Mistakes, which he makes in the Moral part thereof. For he allows *Fornication*, and justifies *Adultery* by his *Law*, and makes *War*, *Rapine* and *Slaughter* to be the main part of the *Religion* which he taught; which being contrary to the Nature of *God*, from whom he says he received it, and contrary to that *Law* of unalterable and eternal Truth, which he hath written in the hearts of all of us from the beginning; the obvious Principles of every Man's reason convict him of falsehood herein, and thereby manifestly prove all the rest to be nothing else, but an abominable Impiety of his own invention. And were the *Religion* of *Jesus Christ*, as delivered to us in the *New Testament*, an *Imposture* like this, it must have the same flaws therein, that is, many falsities in matter of fact, and more in doctrine, and all his *Prophecies* would be without Truth in the Original, or Verification in the Event. And when you can make out any one of these particulars against it, then we will be ready to say the same thereof that you do, That all is *Cheat* and *Imposture*, and
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no credit or faith is any longer to be given thereto.

And 1st. as to the matters of fact contained in the *History of the New Testament* whoever yet convicted any one of them of falsehood? or whoever as much as endeavoured it in the age when the Books were first written, when the falsehood might have been best proved, had there been any such in them, and the doing hereof would have so much served the designs of those bitter enemies of the Christian Cause, who from the first did the utmost they could to suppress it? When Relations of matters of fact pass uncontadicted and uncontroull'd in the Age in which they were transacted, and among those who thought themselves greatly concerned to have them believed false, this must be taken for an undeniable argument of their truth. And this Argument the *History of the New Testament* hath on its side in its fullest strength. For the Books were written and published in the very age in which the things related in them were done, yet no one then ever contradicted or convicted of falsehood any one passage in them, though Christianity had from the very beginning the Professors of all other Religions in most bitter enmity

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against it, who would have been most ready and glad so to do, could they have found but the least pretence for it. And had any of those Relations been false, there were then means enough undeniably to have convicted them of it. For those things, which are related of *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* in the *History of the New Testament*, are not there said to have been done in Corners where none were present to contradict them, but upon the open Stage of the World, and many of them in the sight of thousands; and therefore had they not been really done, or done otherwise than related, there could not have wanted witnesses enough to make proof hereof. And most certainly those who so bitterly opposed *Christianity* from the first would have found them out, and made use of their Testimonies to the utmost for the overthrowing of the Cause they so violently opposed, and had they done so to be sure we should have had those testimonies in the mouths of all its enemies ever since. For they would have yielded them the strongest and the most prevailing argument they could possibly have urged against it. The false pretences of all other *Impostors* have been detected by those who liv'd in their times, and the true

true History is given of them instead of the false ones which they gave of themselves. And had *Jesus Christ* and his *Apologists* been like *Impostors*, and the things related of them in the Books of the *New Testament* false and forged, it is not possible to conceive, especially in the circumstances above-mentioned, how they could have escaped the like discovery; but certainly in this case, amidst so many witnesses, who could have proved the falsehood, and so many enemies who were eager to detect it, all must have come out, and every false Narrative would have been shown to be such, and the true one given in its stead, and we should have heard enough hereof from the adversaries of our *holy Religion* through every age since. And that this was not done, when there was such bitter opposition against the *Christian Religion* from the first propagating of it, and it would have been so strong an argument against it, can be assigned to no other cause, but that the things related were so evidently and manifestly true, as not to afford the least pretence for the contradicting of them. But this is not all we have to say in the case. For it hath not only hapned that none of those matters of fact have ever been contradicted,

dicted, or proved false by any of the first enemies of *Christianity*, who were best able to have done so, had there been that *Imposture* in them which you alledge; but on the contrary many of them have been allowed true, and attested by them. For two of the most surprizing particulars related in the Gospels are confirmed by the Testimony of *Heathen Writers*, I mean the *murder of the Innocents* by *Herod at Bethlehem*, and the *wonderfull Eclipse of the Sun*, which hapned at the death of our *Saviour*, contrary to the nature of a *Solar Eclipse*, when the *Moon* was in the Full (*).

(*) *Saturnal*, lib. 2. c. 4.
(†) *Vide Chronicon Eusebii, & Origenis contra Celsum secundum, & Tract. ad Matthæum 35.*

Macrobius tells us of the former and (†) *Phlegon Trallianus* of the latter. And that which is the most important part of all, and bears the greatest Testimony to the truth of the whole was allowed and acknowledged on all hands both by *Jews* and *Heathens* even in their bitterest opposition against the *Christian Cause*, I mean the account which is given in those sacred Books of the *Miracles* of our *Saviour*. For both of them have yielded to the truth hereof; only the *Jews* say, that he wrought them by virtue of the *Tetragrammaton*, or the sacred Name *Jehovah*, stolen by him out of the *Temple* (which the ridiculousness of the

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Fable they relate concerning it sufficiently confutes) and the *Heathens* by *Magic Art*. And therefore *Philostratus* and *Hierocles* finding no other way to overthrow the authority, which those Miracles gave his *Religion*, confronted against him the *History of Apollonius Tyanaeus*, whom they pretend by the same Art of *Magic* to have done as wonderfull things, and by this means endeavoured at least to invalidate those miraculous Works of his, which they could not deny. And,

2dly. As to the *Prophecies* of our *Saviour*, the truth of their event in every particular proves the truth of him that predicted them. For, did he not come from *God*, how could he have this wonderfull Knowledge, as thus to fore-tell things to come? Were he not of the Secrets of the *Almighty*, how could he so certainly have fore-shown, what in after-times he would bring to pass? If it were only by guess that he did so, how possibly could all things so exactly fall out in the event, that nothing should in the least happen otherwise than as he predicted, especially since as to most of them it cannot be as much as said, that there was any place for humane sagacity, or the least probable conjecture to help him to any fore-sight therein?

in? For how improbable was it that the *Religion* which he taught should, against the bent of the whole World, have made so great and speedy progress therein, as he fore-told that it should? or that such instruments, as he employed in this work, a company of poor, ignorant, and contemptible *Fishermen*, should ever have been able to have effected it? Without the extraordinary Providence of *God* overruling the hearts, as well as the power of Men; a thing in the ordinary course of humane affairs, so unlikely to succeed, could never have been brought to pass; or could our *Saviour* have any manner of ground from the nature of the thing, so much as to guess at so strange an event, and therefore could never have so punctually foretold it; but that being sent of *God* to begin this work, he foreknew all that he would do for the perfecting of it. And the same is to be said of what he further predicted of this *holy Religion* as to its continuance among us to the end of the World, of the calling of the *Gentiles* thereinto, and the rejecting of the *Jews*, of the great calamities which should attend that people (as accordingly they have through all Ages since) and particularly of that great and terrible calamity, which was

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to fall upon them in the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and accordingly hapned about forty years after; which he so exactly fore-told, not only as to the time (for he said it should be before that (*) generation should pass away) but also as to all other the most considerable circumstances of it, that nothing can be a more exact and perfect Comment on the 24th Chapter of St. *Matthew*, and those other passages in the *Gospels*, where this dismal destruction is fore-told, than that *History of Josephus*, which gives us an account how it was brought to pass. And that part of the Prophecy, which relates to the final destruction of the Temple, fore-telling, that one stone should not be left upon another, hath been so exactly verified, that notwithstanding several attempts, which have been made for the re-edifying of it, it could never be effected; no, not as far as the laying of one stone upon another in order thereto, even to this day. And when *Julian the Apostate*, out of design to confront this Prophecy, and give the lye thereto, employed both the Power and the Treasure of the *Roman Empire* for the re-building of it, Heaven it self interposed in an extraordinary manner to make good what he had predicted to be the established

stablished purpose of the *Almighty*, which nothing was able to alter, and by a miraculous Fire destroyed the Work as fast as it was built, and at length forced the Undertakers totally to desist therefrom. For the truth whereof, I will not referr you to the Testimony of *Socrates Scholaisticus*, *Sozomen*, *Chrysostom*, or any other of the *Christian* Writers, who relate it, but to one whom you cannot suspect of serving the interest of the *Christian Cause* herein, he being as much an Adversary thereto as any of you; I mean *Ammianus Marcellinus*, who was an *Heathen* Writer, and then served under *Julian* in his Wars in the *East*, at the same time when this hapned. His Words concerning it (*lib. 23. c. 1.*) are as followeth---
Ambitiosum quondam apud Hierosolymam Templum, quod post multa & interneciva certamina, obidente Vespasiano posteaque Tito, ægre est expugnatum, instaurare sumptibus excogitabat immodicis, negotiumque maturandum Alypius dederat Antiocheni, qui olim Britannos curaverat pro Praefectis. Cum itaque rei idem fortiter instaret Alypius, juvarétque Provinciæ Rector, metuendi globi flamarum prope fundamenta crebris assultibus erumpentes fecere locum, exustis aliquoties operantibus, inaccessum, hocque modo Elemento destinatus repellente cessavit

cessavit incepsum : i. e. "Julian having a design to re build with extraordinary expence the Temple of Jerusalem, formerly a very stately Structure (which, first *Vespasian*, and after *Titus*, laying siege thereto, was, after many bloody Conflicts, at length, with difficulty, taken and destroyed) committed the care of the business to *Alypius* the *Antiochian*, who formerly had been *Propraefect* of *Britanny*, to be with all speed expedited by him. But while *Alypius* was diligently pressing on the Work, and the Gouvernor of the Province helping him therein, dreadfull Balls of Fire breaking forth from the Foundations of the Building, did by their frequent Eruptions make the Place unaccessible, the Workmen being several times destroyed by the Fire, as they went to their Labour ; and by this means the Element still persisting as of purpose to obstruct it, the Work ceased." And it hath never since been again attempted, even to this day ; nor is there now left the least remainder of its Ruins, to show so much as the Place where this Temple once stood? or have those who Travel thither, any other Mark whereby to find it out, but the

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Mahometan Mosque, erected on the same Plat by Omar, the second Successour of *Mahomet*; and which hath now continued for above a thousand years to pollute with the worst of Superstitions, that sacred Ground on which it was formerly built. Had our *Saviour* been an *Impostor*, and fore-told all these things without any Knowledge of the Counsels of him who was to bring them to pass, something certainly must have hapnied in the event of so many particulars, as would have given the Lye to his Predictions, and you the opportunity of convicting him thereof by plain matters of fact falling out contrary to them. And although this could not have been done at first, but possibly such Prophecies as these might have imposed for a while on the credulity of many; yet we that have passed the time of their completion, could never be deceived thereby; but by the Event must plainly know, Whether what he fore-told be true or false, and from thence have enough to make a judgment also of the truth of him that predicted them. And therefore had our *Saviour*, like *Mahomet*, invented his *Religion* to deceive the World; if he intended it should have continued, he must have taken the same

same course that *Mahomet* did, and never ventured at any *Prophecy* at all, that he might not be confuted by the Event, and so lose his whole design. If you answer, That our *Saviour* fore-told future Events after the same manner, as the *Pharisees* said he wrought his *Miracles*; that is, by the *Prince* of the *Devils*, you ascribe that knowledge to the wicked one, which is above his reach to attain unto. The *Oracles*, which he gave in the *Heathen Temples*, only prove him able to cheat Mankind with dubious and dark Answers, but never clearly to inform them of the future Purposes of the *Almighty*. And indeed, how ever can it be imagin'd, that such an accursed one, as he that is cast off at the greatest distance from *God* (who alone governs all the Works of his Creation, and by the Wisdom of his Providence orders every Event that attends them) should ever be so privy to his Counsels, as to be able to foreknow any thing that he determines concerning them; unless it be, where he himself is employed as an Executioner of his Justice to bring it to pass. But all our *Saviour's Predictions* were clear and full, fore-telling things to come, in the same manner as *Historians* relate them when past,

past, without ambiguity in the words; or perplexity in the matter, or the least room left for evasion or deceit in them, and were all as exactly fulfill'd in their appointed time; and we have the continuance of his *Gospel*, the spreading of it through all the *Nations* of the *Earth*, the rejection of the *Jews*, the calamities of those people in a continued Exile, and the total destruction of their *Temple*, standing Evidences hereof, even to this day. And how could all this have ever hap-ned so exactly, according to his Word, but that he was that holy and blessed One, who had the *Counsels* of the *Al-mighty* communicated unto him, and was sent by Him on purpose to declare unto us as many of them, as were necessary for us to know, in order to the attaining of everlasting life. And,

3dly. As to the *Doctrinal part of his Religion*; what can be more worthy of *God*, than the notions which he gives us of him, and the worship which he directs us to render unto him? and what more worthy of us and perfecting of our nature than that Law for the conduct of our lives which he hath delivered unto us? and what can be more holy, pure, and perfect than the Precepts thereof? Here the sublimity

sublimity and vast extent of the matter give scope large enough for the wisest of Men to bewilder and lose themselves in error and mistake, and yet convince us but of any one such in the whole extent of our *Religion*, and that alone shall be sufficient to prove the *Imposture*, you would charge it with, and I will yield you all you would have for the sake thereof. But it is so far herefrom, that I durst make you your selves the judges, whether it delivers any thing else unto us of the nature and excellencies of God, but what the reason of every man (although barely that alone through that cloud of ignorance and error which the Fall hath over-spread us with, could never clearly make the discovery) must now, when thus discover'd, ever justify and admire? whether it prescribes us any one particular relating to his worship, but what is most agreeable to those his excellencies? and whether the Precepts and Laws therein laid down unto us for the governing of our lives and conversations be any other, than what do all correspond so exactly with every thing which the rational dictates of our nature direct us to, that they take them all in without omission or defect, and improve them to the utmost without error or mistake in

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the least circumstance that belongs unto them? If you say, that all this might be attained to by humane wisdom and study; I answer, supposing it could, yet looking on our *Saviour* barely as a Man, and his holy *Apostles* without any other assistance, than that of their own natural endowments, how possibly could they reach so high? To do this requires that vast compass of knowledge in all the things of Nature, Law, and Morality, as it is not possible to conceive Men of their education and low imployments in the World could ever have arrived unto. If you examine what other Men have done by humane wisdom and study only, you will find those of the most elevated *Genius* and sublimest Understanding could never with their utmost industry and search attain unto what you suppose herein, or that the highest knowledge of Men could ever reach that perfection in any of the particulars above-mentioned, in which the *Gospel* of *Jesus Christ* delivers them unto us. For what blunders and absurdities do the wisest of the *Philosophers* lay down concerning the *Deity*? what errors and follies have they taught and practised concerning his worship? and what mistakes have those, who exalted *Morality* to

to the highest pitch among Men, made therein? *Plato* in his Common-wealth allowed the common use of Women. *Aristotle* asserts it to be natural and just for the *Greeks* to make War upon the *Barbarians* for no other reason but that they are so, and both he and *Tully* place Revenge among their virtues. And whoever had vaster capacities for humane knowledge, or ever went higher by the abilities of natural reason and understanding only in the search thereof, than those Men? Yet still being no more than Men, they could not avoid putting something of the infirmities of Man even into that, wherein they made appear their highest perfections, error, mistake and ignorance being so natural unto all of us, that neither the greatest, the wisest, nor the best among us can be totally free therefrom. And therefore had *Christ* and his *Apostles* no other help in the Doctrines which they taught, but that which is humane, they must also in like manner have put that which is humane thereinto, and the infirmities, mistakes, and errors that attend humane nature would have appeared in all that they delivered unto us. But the doctrines, which they taught, and the Books in which they delivered them unto us being so totally free from all such errors and mistakes, as

I have already shown that they are, this directs us to look higher than Man for the *Founder* of this *Holy Religion*, and the *Original Author* of those *Books* in which it is contained, and necessarily prove, that only he who is infinite in knowledge and infinite in all other perfections could thus give us a *Law* so exactly like himself, thoroughly perfect in the whole, and infallibly true in every particular thereof.

S E C T. V.

V. Another Mark of *Imposture* is, That where-ever it is first propagated, it must be done by craft and fraud ; and this is natural to all manner of cheats. For the end of such being to deceive, craft and fraud are the means whereby it is to be effected. In this case a *Lye* must be made to go for a *Truth*, and an appearance for a reality ; and to compass this a great deal of Art must be made use of, both to dress up the Cheat, that it may appear to be what it pretends, and also to cast such a mist before the eyes of Men, that they may not see it to be otherwise, and that especially where the cheat is an *Imposture* in *Religion*. For whoever comes with a *new Religion* to be proposed to the World, must find all men so far prejudiced and pre-

pre-possessed against it; as they are affected to the *old one* they have before professed, and therefore when Men are educated, or any otherwise fixed and settled in a *Religion* (and all mankind are in some or other) they are not apt easily to forego it, but it must be something more than ordinary that must bring them over to another contrary thereto. When the *new Religion* really comes from God (as the *Jewish Religion* first, and after the *Christian* did) it brings its *Credentials* with it, the power of *Miracles* to make way for its reception. For when Men find the Omnipotency of God working with it, they have from thence sufficient evidence given them from whom it comes, and there is need of no other means to induce them to believe, but that the *Religion*, which God doth in such a manner own and attest, must be from him. But where there is no such power accompanying the *new Religion* to gain credit thereto, the defect hereof must be made up by somewhat else to draw over the people to its belief, and this is that which must put all *Impostors* upon craft and fraud in order to the compassing of their ends. But that *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* made use of no such craft or fraud to induce Men into the belief of that *holy Religion*,

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gion, which they taught, and consequently could be no such *Impostors*, will be best made appear by going over all those ways of craft and fraud, which *Mahomet* served himself of, and, by showing you that none of them can possibly be said to have been practised by any of them. For *Mahomet* being one of the craftiest cheats that ever set up to impose a *false Religion* on mankind, and the only person that ever carried on his wicked design with success, you may be sure he left no Art or Device unpractised, which could possibly be made use of with any advantage for the compassing of it. And therefore by proving unto you that none of those methods of craft and fraud, which were made use of for the first propagating of *Mahometism*, were ever practised in the first preaching of *Christianity*, I shall sufficiently prove that no craft or fraud at all, which is any way practicable on such occasions, can ever be charged thereupon. For,

i. *Mahomet* made use of all manner of insinuation both with rich and poor for the gaining of their affection, thereby to gain them to his *Imposture* also. But our *Saviour Christ*, and his *Apostles* did quite the contrary, freely convincing all Men of their sins without having regard to any thing else but the faithfull discharge of the

the *Mission* on which they were sent; which instead of reconciling Men to their persons, provoked the World against them, and they sufficiently experienced it from the ill usage which they found therein.

2. *Mahomet*, the easier to draw over the *Arabians* to his Party, indulged them by his *Law* in all those passions and corrupt affections, which he found them strongly addicted to, especially those of *Lust* and *War*, which those *Barbarians* above all the *Nations* of the *Earth* were by their natural inclinations most violently carried after, and therefore he allows them a plurality of wives, and a free use of their female slaves for the satisfying of their *Lust*, and makes it a main part of his *Religion* for them to fight against, plunder, and destroy all that would not be of it. But *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* allowed no such practices, but strictly prohibited all manner of sin, how much soever in reputation among men, even to the forbidding of many things till then allowed and held lawfull among those who were called God's own people, and therefore instead of seeking the favour of Men by indulging them in their lusts and sinfull practices, they laid a much stricter restraint upon them than was ever done before.

3dly. *Mahomet*, to please his *Arabians*, retained in the *Religion* which he taught them, most of those Rites and Ceremonies, which they had been accustomed to under that which he abolished, and also the *Temple of Mecca*, in which they were chiefly performed. But *Jesus Christ* without having any regard to the pleasing of Men, abolished both the *Temple* and the *Law*, which the *Jews* were so bigotted unto, and also the total worshipping of *God* by *Sacrifices*, without being at all influenced to the contrary by that extravagant fondness, which he knew the whole World had then for them.

4. *Mahomet*, when he found any of his new *Laws* not so well to serve his turn, craftily shifted the *scene*, and brought them about to his purpose by such alterations, as would best suit therewith; and therefore when his making his *Kebla* towards *Jerusalem* did not so well please his Countrymen, he turned it about again towards *Mecca*, and order'd all his *Pilgrimages* thither, as in the time of their *Idolatry*. And the like changes he made in many other particulars according as he found his interest required. And this is that which every *Impostor* must do. For interest being the end, which all such

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aim at, it is impossible that they can so well lay their designs in order to it, but that emerging changes in the one will frequently require changes in the other also. But *Jesus Christ* never made the least alteration in any of the do&ctrines or precepts which he delivered, but what he first taught both he and his Disciples immutably persisted in without at all regarding how violently all the interests of the World ran counter against them herein. And what can be a more certain evidence that none such was the bottom which they were built upon.

5. *Mahomet* under pain of death forbade all manner of *Disputes* about his *Religion*, and nothing could be a wiser course to prevent its follies and absurdities from being detected and exposed. For they being such as could never stand the trial of a rational Examination, they must all have soon been exploded, had every man been allowed the free use of his reason to inquire into them. But *Christ* and his *Apostles* direct the quite contrary course. For our *Saviour* bids the *Jews* search the *Scriptures* for the trial of those truths which he taught them, (*John 5.v. 39.*) And the *Noble Beræans* are commended, —that they did so, before they would receive

ceive those doctrines of the *Christian Religion*, which were preached unto them, *Acts 17. v. 11.* And St. *Paul* gives us this general rule, first to prove or try all things, and then to hold fast that only which we find to be good, *1 Thess. 5. v. 21.* It is only error and falsehood that desires to shelter it self in the dark, and dares not expose it self to an open view and trial. But Truth being always certain of its own stability, makes use of no art to support it self, but dares venture it self abroad on its own foundation only, and boldly offers it self to every Man's search; and the more it is sifted and examined into, the more bright and resplendent will it always appear. And since *Christianity* from the first ever took this course, (as it still doth where-ever purely professed) and instead of prohibiting *Disputes* about it, invites all Men to search and examine therewith; this sufficiently argues, how certain the first *Teachers* of it were of its Truth, and that no Cheat or *Imposture* could ever be intended thereby.

6. *Mahomet* made choice of a People first to propagate his *Imposture* among, who were of all Men most fitted to receive it; and that on two accounts: 1. Because of the indifference which they were

were then grown to as to any Religion at all ; And, 2. Because of the great ignorance they were in of all manner of Learning at that time, when he first vented his Forgeries among them, there being then but only one Man among all the Inhabitants of *Mecca* that could either write or read. For who are more fit to be imposed on, than the ignorant ? and who can be more easie to receive a new Religion, than those who are not pre-possessed with any other to prejudice them against it ? The *Papists*, who, next *Mahomet*, have the greatest claim to *Imposture*, as to those errours which they teach, very well understand how such a Cause is to be served by both these Particulars ; and therefore make it their businels, as much as they can, to keep their own People in ignorance, and pervert all those they call *Hereticks* to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*, that so having no Religion at all, they may be the better prepared again to receive theirs. And that there are so many *Atheists* now among us, it is too well known, how much it is owing to this their *Hellish artifice* against us. But all was quite contrary as to those whom *Christ* and his *Apollies* first preached our holy Religion unto. Our Saviour did not chuse such ignorant

norant Times to come among us in, or a People so indifferent in *Religion*, first to manifest himself unto. For the *Jews* were so far from being weary of that *Religion*, which they had so long professed, when he first appeared in his *Mission* among them, that they were then grown into the contrary extreme ; a very extravagant bigotry and superstition concerning it ; so that nothing was more difficult, than to withdraw them from it ; nor could any thing be more offensive to them, than an offer tending thereto ; and so it continues with them, even to this day. And the case was not much otherwise as to all the rest of Mankind ; the *Gentiles* being then grown almost as tenacious of their *Idolatry*, as the *Jews* of their *Law* ; and *Learning* was in that Age among both at the highest pitch, that ever it was in the World ; and consequently, Men were never less disposed, than at that time, to receive a *new Religion*, or ever better able to defend their *old*. And therefore had *Christianity* been an *Imposture*, it could never have escaped in such an Age as that a full detection, or ever have been able to have born up against it ; such inquisitive Heads and piercing Wits, as were then in the World, would have sifted it

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to the bottom, dived into its deepest Secrets, and unravell'd and laid open the whole Plot, and the prejudiced World would immediately have crushed it to pieces thereon, so that it should never more have appeared among Mankind. But the truth of our *holy Religion* was such, that it boldly offered it self to this trial; and it seems to have chosen such an Age as this, first to come into the World of purpose to undergo it, that so it might be the better justified thereby. And justified by it it was; for although it were opposed by the utmost Violence of the prejudiced World, they could get no ground of it; though it were thoroughly examined and diligently searched into by the acutest and subtlest Wits of those Ages in which it first appeared, they could never discover any fraud, or make out the least flaw therein; but in spight of both it triumphed by its own naked Truth only over all manner of opposition, and by *God's Mercy* continues still so to do, even to this day. That a cheat and a fraud in a thing of this nature should be imposed on Men totally ignorant and illiterate, or that such as they, when void of all manner of Religion, (as the Men of *Mecca* for the most part were when *Mahomet* began his

his *Imposture* among them) should be easie to imbrace a new one, is no hard matter to conceive; but that an *Imposture* should be received, and obtain such prevalency over Men in so learned and discerning an Age, as that wherein *Christianity* first appeared in the World, or that they who were then so zealously addicted to the *Religion*, they had been educated in, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles* should ever have been induced to forsake it for a new one, founded only on cheat and fraud, is what, morally speaking, we may very well reckon impossible.

7. *Mahomet* offered at no *Prophecies*, that he might not run the hazard of being confuted by the Event. But *Jesus Christ* delivered many clear and plain *Prophecies*, several of which respected that very Age in which he lived, and were all in their proper time as plainly verified by the completion of them.

8. *Mahomet* offered at no *Miracles* in publick, although continually called upon and provoked to it by his opposers. For not being able to work any true ones he would not hazard himself to a discovery by those which were Counterfeit. And therefore all those things which he would have go for *Miracles*; that is, his

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Converse with the *Angel Gabriel*, his *Journey to Heaven*, and the *Armies of Angels* that helped him in his *Battles*, are only related by him as things acted behind the *Curtain*, of which there was no other witness but himself alone, and consequently there could be no witness on the other side ever to contradict them. But *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* having the real power of working *Miracles* did them openly in the sight of thousands, where all manner of opportunity was given to every spectator to examine into them, and try whether they were true or no; and therefore had there been any cheat or fraud in them, it is not possible to conceive how they should have escaped a discovery. And yet no such discovery could ever be made, which was so convincing an argument of their truth and reality, that even the bitterest enemies of our *holy Religion* from the first yielded in this particular, and both *Jews* and *Heathens* allowed all those miraculous Works, which are related of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* in the Books of the *New Testament* to have been really and truly wrought by them, as hath been afore-observed. And indeed the evidence was too manifest to be denied, since those very blind that received

ceived their sight, those dumb that were enabled to speak, those deaf that were restor'd to their hearing, those lame that were made to walk, and those dead that were raised again to life, lived many years after to be as standing Monuments of the truth of those things, which no one could contradict. And therefore the Opposers of the *Gospel* of *Jesus Christ* have all along rather chosen to invalidate the authority of those *Miracles*, than deny the truth and reality of them.

For they allowing the matters of fact object that there are other Powers lower than the divine, that are able to bring them to pass; and therefore, although those Works were wrought, they do not yet prove either the persons or the doctrines which they taught to come from *God*, and consequently can give no such evidence, as that which we insist upon from them for the truth of that *Religion* which we profess; That others by *Magick Art* have done the same things; That the *Scriptures* themselves tell us so of *Jannes*, and *Jambres*, and *Simon Magus*; and profane Writers of *Apollonius Tyanaeus*, *Apuleius*, and others; that both *Moses* and *Jesus Christ* knew this very well, and therefore forewarned their *Disciples* against it,

it, telling them that *false Prophets* should arise, who should show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the very Elect; and that they should take care not to hearken to them. And therefore, say they, if signs and wonders can be wrought by *false Prophets*, how can they be evidences for the true? Or how can we at all rely upon them for the verifying of any doctrine which they deliver unto us? Or if those *Miracles*, which were wrought by them who are sent of God, be only true *Miracles*, and all others false ones, how shall we distinguish the one from the other, so as by them to discern, whether the doctrines be of *God* or no?

But these Difficulties will be easily removed, and the *Miracles* of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, as they are allowed to be truly wrought by them; so also will they as truly prove the Doctrines which they taught to come from *God*, if you will but consider these following Particulars.

I. *Miracles* are works done, which are strange and amazing to us, as being brought to pass out of the ordinary road, and in a manner which we cannot comprehend; and these are of two sorts:

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1. Such as exceed only the Power of Man to effect them ; and these we call *signs* or *wonders* ; And, 2. Such as exceed the Power of any created Being whatsoever ; and these only are properly *Miracles*.

2. Where-ever such *Miracles* are wrought, as are of this last sort, *God* alone must be the *Author* of them ; and therefore, where-ever such are found, they manifestly prove the Power of *God* co-operating with the Persons, at whose word they are done ; and with whomsoever it doth thus co-operate, it necessarily demonstrates their *Mission* from him, and puts such an *Authentick Seal* to the Truth of the *Doctrines* which they teach, as cannot be denied.

3. Where-ever a creating Power is necessary to the effect produced, or the stated Laws of Nature are altered, there it is certain none but *God* himself can be the *Author* of the Work done. For he alone is able to create ; and he having created all things according to his infinite Wisdom, and given to each their proper Essence and Operations, he allows none but himself to alter the Natures of them, or change that Course which he hath put them into.

4. But

4. But within the Laws and Powers of *Nature*, there are abundance of things, which exceed the Power of Man to effect, and therefore seem as *Miracles* to us, which may be produced by other created Beings; and these are *evil spirits* as well as *good*.

5. To the producing of these effects, *evil spirits* as well as *good* are enabled two manner of Ways : 1. By their greater Knowledge of the Powers of Nature ; And, 2. By the greater Agency which they have to apply them to effect. For,

6. There are a multitude of things in *Nature*, that those *Spirits* know the Nature of, which we do not. For their Abilities of knowing are vastly above ours, as not working by the dull Tools of Earth and Clay as we do, and their Experience exceedingly greater, as having known the Works of *God* from the beginning, and by long Observation pried deep into the Secrets of them. If a *Chymist* or a *Mathematician*, by his Skill in the Powers of *Nature*, can do many things, which to the ignorant and unlearned shall seem as *Miracles*, (as we often find) how much more can those knowing *Spirits* do so, whose Knowledge of the Powers of *Na-*

ture is vastly more above all ours put together, than the highest and perfectest of ours is above that of the most ignorant that lives among us. But,

7. As those *Spirits* have a vastly greater Knowledge of the Powers of *Nature* than we can have, so also have they a vastly greater Power to apply them to effect. For they are of a much greater agility in their motion, of a much finer substance to penetrate into things, and actuate them into operation; and also of a much stronger agency or power to work, than we have, and which, no doubt, they are endowed more or less with, according to the different orders and degrees in which *God* hath created them; and by both these together, that is, their greater Knowledge of natural Causes, and their greater Power to apply them to effect, can they do a great many things within *Nature's* limits, which exceed all the Powers of Men to effect, and seem as miraculous and wonderfull unto us, when ever brought to pass.

8. *Good Spirits* never work those *Miracles*, but in subserviency to the divine Will, as they are necessary for the effecting of those things which *God* hath ordained by their *Ministry* to bring to pass.

And

And to them those *Miracles* mentioned in *Scripture*, which exceed not the Power of such created Beings, may be referred as the immediate Authors of them ; it not being likely that *God* would interpose his immediate Power, excepting only in such cases, as where there was need of it. For why should the *Lord* himself put his hand to that work, which may as well be discharged by the *Ministry* of his *Servants* ?

9. *Evil Spirits* having in a great measure the same Knowledge of Natural Causes as the *good*, and the like Power to bring them to effect can also work the like *wonders*, and by *God* are often permitted so to do, both for the trial of Men, and also for other good Causes, which to him of his infinite Wisdom seem fitting; and we have a plain instance of it in the Case of *Job*.

10. *Evil Spirits* have not only this Power of working the like Wonders, which *Good Spirits* do, but also another, which *Good Spirits* will never make use of ; that is, by juggle, delusion, and deceit to imitate those true and proper *Miracles*, which none but *God* himself can really effect. And thus by the delusion of the *Devil* was a cheat put upon *Saul*

in the raising of *Samuel* to him from the dead : For really, to raise *Samuel* from the dead, none but *God* could ; and therefore that appearance, which *Saul* saw, was no more than a false appearance, contrived by the *Devil* to put a cheat and delusion upon him. And of this same sort may we reckon the *Miracles* which *Jannes* and *Jambres* wrought in imitation of *Moses*. For to turn a Rod into a Serpent, and Water into Blood, or to cause Frogs to come up upon the Land (in which three Particulars they did the same thing by their enchantments, that *Moses* did by the hand of *God*) are Works, which, if really done, require the creating Power to bring them to effect, which none but *God* hath ; and therefore in this case the *Devil* acted for them, not by his effecting, but only by his deluding Power. And such *Miracles* the *Scripture* calls *τέλετα ψεύτες κατ' εἰδένειαν τῆς Σατανᾶ* ; i. e. *Lying or false Miracles, which are not really wrought, but only made so to appear by the juggling and delusion of Satan.*

[¶] *Theffl. 2. 9.*

II. Those cheats and delusions of the *Devil*, whereby he imitates the true and real *Miracles* of *God*, which he cannot work, are only transient Effects, like those of Jugglers upon a Stage, never in

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such as are lasting and permanent. And where the Effect is totally transient, God's Works are often so far above the Devil's Imitation, that even in these there will be still a multitude of Particulars, wherein he can have no power, as much as by juggling or delusion, to do any thing like unto them.

12. Whatsoever *signs* or *wonders* are wrought by *Magicians* or *false Prophets*, must be referred to one of these two Heads; that is, that they are either the Devil's Works, or the Devil's Delusions; and the *Scriptures*, which tell us of *Magicians* and *false Prophets* working such *signs* and *wonders*, do in many places refer them hereto.

13. Those *signs* or *wonders* which are really wrought by the Devil and his *Evil Spirits*, are to be distinguished from those which are wrought by the Power of *Angels* or *Good Spirits*, by these following Marks: 1. That *Angels* or *Good Spirits* never work those *Wonders*, but in sub-serviency to the Will of God, for the promoting of Truth and Righteousness; but the Devil and his *Evil Spirits* only for the promoting of Error and Wickedness. 2. *Angels* or *Good Spirits* never co-operate in the production of those *Wonders* with

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any *Prophet* or *Teacher*, but such only as being sent of *God*, are good and righteous Persons ; but the *Devil* and his *Evil Spirits* only with such, as not being sent of *God*, are Evil like themselves. 3. *Angels* or *Good Spirits* never exert their Power to work these *Wonders*, but in things serious and grave, whereby either the Good of Men or the Honour of *God* is promoted ; but the *Devil* and his *Evil Spirits* do it mostly in things mischievous both to *God's Honour* and *Man's Good*, or else in such trivial and foolish matters, as are beneath *God* or his holy *Angels* to be concerned in. And by the same Marks also may we distinguish *God's Miracles* from the *Devil's Juggles*, and those wonderfull Works which the Hand of the *Almighty* really effecteth from those false Appearances, which the *Devil* makes in imitation of them to put a cheat and a delusion upon us. Which Particulars being premised, the Answer to the foregoing Objections will be as followeth.

1. We do acknowledge that abundance of very wonderfull Works may be effected by Powers lower than the divine, and that not only by *Good Spirits*, but also by *Evil*.

2. That

2. That therefore such Works alone are never sufficient proof of a divine *Mission*, unless corroborated by such concurring circumstances, as prove them not to be from *Evil Spirits*, but only from *Good*.

3. That where-ever such wonderfull Works are done at the word of a wicked Man, or to a wicked purpose, (*i. e.* either to influence to a wicked practice, or to give credit to some false doctrine) or else in such mean and trivial cases as are beneath the *Majesty of God*, or his *Ministring Spirits* to be concerned in, there we may be sure that he that doth those Works, how much soever he may pretend to a divine *Mission*, is only a *false Prophet*; and that it is not by the Power of *God* or his *Good Spirits*, but only by the Power of the *Devil* and his *Wicked Spirits* that they are wrought; and against those *Wonders* is it, and the Workers of them, that *Moses* warneth the *Jews*, and *Jesus Christ* his *Disciples*, that they should be aware of them.

4. Where they, who work those *Wonders*, are holy and righteous Men, and do not teach any Doctrine contrary to the certain Dictates of *Natural Religion*, or the *Revelations of God* afore given unto us, and
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the *Wonders* which they work are in such serious and grave Matters, as are not unworthy of *God*, or his *Ministring Spirits* to be concerned in, there we have no reason to suspect *Satan's* Power in the effecting of them ; and therefore such Works may, although not of themselves alone, yet with these concurring circumstances be sufficient proof of the truth of any Doctrine which they give testimony unto. For although they cannot be proved to be immediately from *God*, because producable by inferiour Beings ; yet with these circumstances accompanying them, they must at least appear to be the Works of his *Ministring Spirits*, who can bear testimony to nothing, but what is from *God*, whose Will they are in all things subservient unto.

5. As such Works, which the *Devil* and his *Evil Spirits* can do, are not of self-sufficient proof to a *divine Mission*, so neither are such which he can by *juggle* or *delusion* imitate, because Men may be deceived by the one as well as the other ; and therefore the same concurring circumstances are necessary to these also, and by the same Marks are they to be tried, whether they be of *God*, or no.

6. But

6. But where the *Works* are such, as no created Being can either really produce, or by *juggle* or *delusion* imitate, there those *Works* do of themselves alone prove a *divine Mission*, and give an authentick Seal of undeniable Truth to every Doctrine thus revealed unto us.

7. Although therefore it should be allowed, that some of the *Miracles*, which *Christ* and his *Apostles* wrought, might be producable by Powers lower than the divine; yet since they who did them were most holy and righteous Persons, and did not teach any Doctrine, contrary either to the *Dictates of Natural Religion*, or the *Revelations of God* afore given unto Men; and the *Miracles* themselves were not in such mean and trivial cases, as are related of *Apollonius Tyanaeus*, and others like him; with these circumstances they sufficiently appear to be, if not immediately from the hand of *God*, yet at least from his *Ministring Spirits*, and their *Works*; since all done in subserviency to the divine Will, do as thoroughly prove a *divine Mission*, where-ever they evidently appear to be theirs, as those of *God* himself. That *Christ* and his *Apostles* were most holy and righteous Persons, and taught no Doctrine, which was in the least contrary to

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to the Dictates of *Natural Religion*, hath been afore shown; and how far their *Miracles* were from being in mean and trivial matters, the Works themselves make evident: And it is as certain, that no Doctrine of theirs ever contradicted in the least any *divine Revelation afore-given unto Men*. For *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* everywhere allow both the *Law* and the *Prophets* to be from *God*. Had they taught any thing which would have charged a falsehood on either, they must then indeed have been said to contradict *divine Revelations afore-given*, and would thereby have fallen under that character and mark of *false Prophets*, which I have above laid down; but they were so far from this, that the *Law* and the *Prophets* were the ground-work, which they founded all their Doctrines upon. For the *Law* contained in *Types* and *Shadows*, and the *Prophets* in their *Prophecies* and *dark Sayings*, what-ever the *Gospel* hath in substance and reality since clearly delivered unto us, and laid down all that in the *first Rudiments*, which *Christ* and his *Apostles* afterwards built up into perfection in that *holy Religion*, which they have given unto us. And therefore, although the *Gospel* hath abolished the *Law*, it was not by contradicting

dicting or condemning it, but by perfecting and fulfilling it in that manner, as all the *Prophets* fore-showed that it should.

8. But the *Miracles* of *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* were most of them undeniably such, as could not be produced but by the immediate hand of *God* himself, as necessarily requiring the *creating Power* to effect them; and also of that *permanency*, as allowed no room for *joggle* or *delusion* to take place in them. For what other Power but that of the *Almighty* could raise a Man, who had been four days dead, again to life? Or what other hand, but that of the *Creator* himself, could make him see, who had been without the natural organs of Sight from his very birth? Or what but the same Power, which first formed Man of the dust of the Earth, cou'd restore him in so many instances, as our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* did, to health and perfection, when the very Parts and Vessels necessary thereto were thoroughly perished; and in so miraculous a manner, with a word of their mouth, bring back total privations again to their former habits? Or what craft of *Satan* can reach as much as to an imitation of such wonderfull Works as these, which left behind

hind them for many years after, effects of lasting permanency in the persons cured, not only to be Monuments of things done, but also undeniable evidences of the truth and reality of them? It would be too long to go over all the *Miracles* of this nature, which *Christ* and his *holy Apostles* did for the confirmation of those holy Truths which they taught. These already mentioned are sufficient to show, that some of their *Miracles* at least were such, as are above the Powers of all created Beings either to effect or imitate; and therefore these certainly must be allowed to be from *God* alone without possibility of *Imposture*, *deceit*, or *delusion* in them; and in that they are so, they must necessarily prove the *Mission* of them, at whose word they were done, to be from him also, and consequently become a witness to the truth of every Doctrine delivered by them, as firm, certain, and infallible, as the Veracity of *God* himself, which can never err or deceive for ever. And so much of the fifth Mark of *Imposture*.

S E C T.

S E C T. VI.

VI. No *Imposture*, when entrusted with many *Conspirators*, can be long concealed. For what *Plot* or *Conspiracy* have we ever known or heard of, which hath been thus managed, and hath not had some false Brother or other to discover it? especially if there be any great Wickedness intended by it, or any great Danger attending the execution of it (as mostly is in such designs.) For then if the thing it self doth not work the Conscience into an abhorrence, the fear of the Consequence may at least deterr from it; and it seldom fails but one of these two, in all such cases, drives some or other into a discovery; and in this Age of Plots we have instances enough hereof. And what *Plot* can be more wicked than to impose a *false Religion* upon Mankind? and what can be more dangerous than to attempt it? What hath been already said, sufficiently proves both these Particulars; and therefore if the first planting of *Christianity* were such a *Plot*; certainly one of these two, that is, either the Wickedness, or the Danger, would have wrought some or other into a discovery of it. For they were

were not a few that were admitted thereinto. They were at least (*) *five hundred* that were in that, which you must call the greatest secret of it; I mean the *Resurrection* of our *Saviour* from the dead: For that is the main *Article* of our *holy Christian Religion*; the truth of which proves all the rest, and without which all the rest must have fallen to the ground,

(†) *Cor. 15.17.* and our whole *Faith become* (†) *vain*. And therefore had but any one of these *five hundred*, who are asserted to have been the *Witnesses* of it, discovered the thing to have been only a *Conspiracy of Impositure* between them, this discovery must have laid open the whole design, and put a total end thereto. And were not the thing certainly true, which they attested, it is scarce to be conceived, but that some or other of them must have done so. Among the *twelve Apostles*, one was found a *Traytor* to his *Master*; and how much more then may we expect that there should have been one such among *five hundred*? and especially in a case where all ought to have been so; that is, to discover a *Plot* against the *Souls* of all *Mankind*, and deliver the *World* from being imposed on thereby. Among so many it scarce happens, but some or other prove

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false to the best Cause ; and how hard is it then to conceive, that in such a number none should be found to betray the worst ? And can he call it any other than the worst, if it be such an *Imposture*, as you would have it to be ? Were Christianity really such, and this Doctrine of the Resurrection of our Saviour totally the Forgery of those who attested it, so many as five hundred could never have all kept the Secret ; or if they should out of love to their own invention, or any self-ends which they might have therein, be inclined so to do ; yet punishment, pain, and torture, use to extort the most hidden devices, and make the most obstinate offenders, the closest designers, and the most reserved plotters of mischief to come to a Confession. And what punishments, what pains, what tortures did those first Witnesses of this main and fundamental Article of our Faith go thorough for the sake of that Testimony which they did bear thereto ? and yet did any one of them ever flinch from it ? did any one of them ever retract, what he had attested concerning it ? Prove but this, and then you will say something to make out the Charge, which you lay against it. But they were so far herefrom, that they all persisted in

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it to the last ; and not only so, but were every one of them ready to shed their blood for a witness to the truth of what they asserted, and a great many of them actually did so, and all the terrors, threats, and tortures of the Persecutors were not able to deterr them herefrom. And what greater evidence then can there be given to any truth in the World, which depends upon matter of fact, than that which *Christianity* hath from the Testimony of those Men, in so great a number and such a manner bearing witness thereto ?

S E C T. VII.

VII. The last Mark of an *Imposture* is, That it can never be established without force and violence. For if it hath wicked Men for its Authors, worldly Interest for its End, Falsity and Errour for its Doctrines, and receives its Rise from the craft and fraud of its first Promoters, as I have already shewn, the search of the inquisitive will soon find it out, and Mankind will not long bear the *Imposture*, unless they be over-ruled by Violence, and have all Objections against it silenced with the Sword at their Throats. This was the Method which *Mahomet* took to establish that *false Religion*, which he invented.

vented. For he prosecuted with War all that would not submit thereto, and made it no less than Death for any to gain-say it, or as much as raise the least dispute against any of the Doctrines of it. And without his doing this, the reason of all Mankind must have appeared against it, and it could never have stood. And the Romanists have learnt from him to take the same course, as to those Doctrines of *Imposture* which they have super-added to the *Christian Religion*. For they declare all those to be *Hereticks*, and prosecute them with Sword, Fire, and Faggot, that refuse to receive them; and thus by the Power of their *Dragoons* and their *Inquisitions* they have established, and still keep up those gross errors in their *Church*, which neither *Reason* nor *Religion* can ever support, and the same must be done as to all other falsities imposed on mankind before they can have any firm footing among them. For it is only force and violence, that can cram such things down men's throats, which their reason and their judgment must ever renounce. The unthinking multitude may for a while be carried away by the craft of the *Impostor* and by the arts of *Hypocrisie* and *Delusion* be made easie to swallow any forgery

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that shall be offered unto them, but when the heat of the first zeal is over, and the matter comes to be examined into by reason, and coolly scanned through by the inquisitive, *Imposture* cannot stand the Test, but must soon be laid open, blasted and exploded thereon. And therefore unless it be accompanied with force to suppress this iniquity and hath power on its side to compell Men to acquiesce therein, how much soever it may delude Men at first, it can never obtain any lasting establishment among them. And this hath been the case of all the *Impostors* which have ever yet appeared in the World without this power to back them, and how great progress soever any of them may have made in the first heat, they have all at length been detected, and exploded, and sunk to nothing for want of this support on their side to keep them up. For nothing but truth can of it self alone stand the Test of ages upon its own bottom only. Falsehood and error are too weak for such a Trial, and therefore unless supported by some external strength and fenced thereby against all assaults of opposers they must necessarily fall to the ground and again come to nothing, and where education or the force of long received

ceived custom is not strong enough for this (and neither can in the first propagating of an *Imposture*) there the sword must come in to over-rule all, or nothing of this nature can be established among Men. But *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* instead of making use of any such force to establish the Religion which they taught, had all the force and powers of the World in opposition against it, and yet in spight of the World it at length prevailed over the World by the dint of its own truth only, and after having stood the assault of all manner of persecutions, as well as other oppositions for three hundred years together carried the victory over the fiercest of its enemies, and made the greatest of them, even the *Roman Emperours* themselves to submit thereto, and all this while it had sharpened against it, not only the Sword of the Superior Powers, but also the tongues of the slanderers, and the wits of all the learned of those times. But how much soever it was oppressed by the first of these, blackned by the second, and sifted and searched into by the last, it stood all these Trials without losing any thing thereby, but at last came out of them all, like Gold out of the Furnace, still of the same weight, fineness, and

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purity, without receiving from that fire, which consumeth all things else, the least wast or diminution thereof. Had it been false and owed its Original only to Deceit and *Imposture*, it would have needed all those means of Violence for its establishment and support, but since it thus stood not only without them, but also in spight of them; when all armed on the adversaries side for three Centuries together in bitter opposition against it, what greater argument can we have for the truth thereof? For can you think that *Falsehood* and *Imposture* could ever have held out with such steady and unshaken constancy for so many years, as *Christianity* thus did? or that it is possible for any sort of Men so long to have born all this for the sake of a *Lye*? *Falsehood* can have no foundation for such a Constancy, or *Imposture* any reason to engage Men thereto. The interest of this World is ever the bottom and foundation of all such *Forgeries*; and therefore, as soon as punishments, and persecutions make it to be no Man's interest to be for them, they ever fall of themselves for want of that foundation on which they afore stood. But *Christianity* having come into the World contrary to all the interests of it, and in its very infancy thus stood

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the shock of all the powers thereof engaged in persecution against it, as I have mentioned; and not only so, but also prospered and became established in the midst of the hottest assaults thereof, this plainly shows that it had another kind of foundation on which it was built, a foundation of Truth and Righteousness, and not only so, but a foundation that was laid and fix'd in such a manner by the hand of God himself as never to be shaken. For what truth of it self alone could ever have made its way into the World in such a manner as the *Christian Religion* did, or ever have gained against all the powers thereof such a prevalency over it without some extraordinary assistance conducting and helping it therein? The strongest Truths we know are crush'd by such means of violence, as that encountered with, and even first principles themselves have been over-powered by them. And therefore that *Christianity* should thus enter the World, and thus from its first Entry bear up against such long and terrible Trials of perfecution and oppression, as it met with, without the least flinching under them, must be owing to somewhat more than its own bare truth. And what but the hand of God himself backing and strengthening it

in the conflict, could be sufficient to give it such a victory therein? For that a few poor *Fishermen*, the *Disciples* of a *Crucified Master*, should without power, learning, or reputation, or any other of the interests, or favours of the world on their side, be able to introduce a *new Religion* into the World directly opposite to all the interests, pleasures, and prevailing humours of it, as *Christianity* then was, and that this *Religion* in spight of all the powers, cunning, malice, and learning of the World joyned together in most fierce opposition, and bitter persecution against it for three hundred years together should not only bear up, but also at length prevail over the World, and subject the highest powers therein to the obedience of its Laws is an event so strange and wonderfull, and morally speaking so far above the possibility of all ordinary means to bring it to pass, as plainly manifesteth the extraordinary working of *God himself* therein. And for my part had *Christian Religion* no other *Miracle* to bear witness thereto, this alone would be *Miracle* enough to me sufficiently to convince me of the truth thereof. At least since it thus entered into the World, and thus became established in it, it must be allow-ed

ed to be so far differing from an *Imposture* in that method of violence which that needs for its establishment, as to be totally opposite thereto, and in this particular (as I hope I have shown of all the rest) not to have the least mark or character thereof.

And thus far having laid before you all the obvious marks of *Imposture*, and proved that none of them can belong to *Christianity*, I hope what hath been said will sufficiently inferr the conclusion; which I have undertaken to make out unto you, That our *Holy Christian Religion* cannot be such an *Imposture*, as you would have it to be, but really is that sacred truth of *God*, which you are all bound to believe.

It is too common with mankind to frame their judgments according to their inclinations, and upon very slight grounds hastily to run away with idea's of things, when they correspond with the prevailing bent of their affections, which, whenever put into a true light before them, must all appear to be false and wrong taken. And this I reckon to be your case. Your inclinations strongly leading you into Infidelity, you would fain have *Christianity* be an *Imposture*, and therefore have over-easily and hastily been induced

duced on very weak grounds to believe it so to be. And that you may be undeceived in so dangerous and destructive an error, I have endeavoured in the easiest and most familiar manner I could think of, to put this business in a true light before you. 1. By letting you see what an *Imposture* is in that true picture, which I have drawn of it in the Life of him who was really and truly such an *Impostor*, as you would have *Jesus Christ* to be; And, 2. By examining into the Marks and Properties which naturally belong to every such *Imposture*, and showing of each of them that they cannot belong to that *holy Religion* which we profess. And I hope, when you have considered all this thoroughly, you will see how much you have been deceived in those Opinions, which you have so precipitately given up your selves unto.

You cannot but be sensible how great the stress is, which we lay on this matter, and how very ill your case must be, if we are in the right and you in the wrong; and therefore the thing is of sufficient importance to deserve your most serious consideration, and that in such a manner as to make you lay aside all those groundless prejudices and wrong byasses which may

may obstruct an impartial inquiry ; and if you will be pleased, for the sake of your own Souls, to do thus much, I am content to leave the success of what I now offer unto you, to *God's* grace, and your own judgments.

As to the particular reasons which you may alledge for your disbelief of our *holy Christian Religion*, whether they be Objections drawn against it either from *History*, *Philosophy*, or the *inconsistencies* which you imagine you find in the Books of holy Writ in which it is delivered down unto us, it is not my purpose now to enter into any Disputes with you about them. That which I at present purpose, is not so much to consider those *premises*, as the *Conclusion* which you pretend to draw herefrom, That *Christianity* must therefore be an *Imposture*, and from the nature of such an *Imposture*, and the nature of our *holy Christian Religion* laid in a true light, and compared together with each other to evidence unto you the inconsistency of this Charge ; and if what I have now said can be of any force to let you in to a clear sight of this matter, it will be totally needless for me to meddle any further. For all those Objections, which you pretend to have been the particular Reasons
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of your Infidelity, have been already abundantly answered and confuted by others. But the opinion which you have conceived that *Christianity* is an *Imposture*, having so far pre-possessed your judgment, as to influence it against all things of this nature that can be proposed unto you, it will be in vain to offer any thing farther as to those particulars, till this prejudice be removed; and were it once removed, what hath already been said in answer to them, will be abundantly sufficient to give you full satisfaction. Although this method may seem illogical thus to assault the *Conclusion* without meddling with the *Premisses* from which you pretend to have deduced it; yet it is no other, than what you yourselves have necessitated me unto by taking up the *Conclusion* first, and the *Premisses* afterward. Had you indeed first began with those Reasons which you offer for your Infidelity, and been really by the conviction of them led into this *Conclusion*, That *Christianity* is an *Imposture*, it would then have been proper and fitting that I should have begun there too, and no otherwise have endeavoured to overthrow the *Conclusion*, but by first overthrowing the *Premisses* from whence you deduced it. But since it is well known that

that the *Conclusion* hath been of greater force with the most of you to make you assent to the *Premisses*, than the *Premisses* to prove the *Conclusion*; and it is only the fond conceit you have taken up in compliance with ill company or worse inclinations, that *Christianity* must be an *Imposture*, that hath made any of those arguments seem so conclusive with you, which are brought to prove it; this makes it necessary for me to begin my endeavours for your conviction at that same point, where you first began your Infidelity, and to attack the *Conclusion* in the first place, before any success can be expected towards the setting you right as to any thing else. For as long as you are wilfully bent out of a meer fondness for Infidelity to hold *Christianity* to be an *Imposture*, this will make every Argument seem strong to you that is brought to prove it, and every Solution insufficient which is given thereto, and render all means for your Conviction utterly ineffectual unto you. And therefore this being in truth the first Error which hath influenced your Mind to all the rest, this must be first removed; and if what I have said can be of any force in order hereto, by letting you see how much you have been mistaken

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mistaken herein, this I hope will remove that prejudice, which hath hindered you from seeing the strength of those Arguments, which have been already offered for your Conviction as to all other particulars of that Infidelity which you have given up your selves unto, and make you clearly discern how much you have been mistaken in them also, and thereby become the means of delivering your Souls from that terrible danger, which you expose them unto; the accomplishing of which is the whole End, Scope, and Design of the Discourse, which I now offer unto you.

But here perchance it may be asked, and I think it reasonable to give you satisfaction herein, Why I have set forth unto you an *Imposture* by so foul a picture as that of *Mahomet*? And to this I have these two Answers to return: 1. Because I have none other to do it by, *Mahomet* being the only *Impostor*, who could ever prevail so far, as to establish his *Imposture*, and make it a standing *Religion* in the World; and had it not gone so far, it could not have been such an *Imposture*, as you would have *Christianity* to be, or at all fit to be compared with it in the Argument now before us. And, 2dly. How foul

foul soever the Picture of *Mahomet* may be, we have no reason from the nature of the thing ever to imagine that any other *Impostor* can have a fairer, till you bring us an instance thereof. And these two I hope may be sufficient to clear me from acting any way unfairly in this matter, as if I had made choice of the Life of so wicked a person as *Mahomet* therein to picture out an *Imposture* unto you only to make it appear in the foulest dress it is capable of, the better to advantage thereby that Cause which I handle.

But to the first of these Answers, I fore-see this Objection will be made: If *Mahomet* be the only *Impostor* that ever established his *Imposture* in the World, how then hath it come to pass, that there have been so many false *Religions* among Mankind? To which I reply, Not by *Imposture*, such as *Mahomet's* was, and such as *Christianity* must be, if it be such an *Imposture* as your charge against it supposeth, but by corruptions insensibly growing on from that *Religion*, which was first true. The first *Religion* which God gave unto Man was that *Natural Religion*, which he imprinted on his very Nature, when he first created him, and as much of that as escaped that ruin, with which
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the fall overwhelmed him, was that whereby *God* was worshipped and served by him afterwards; only with this addition, That whereas Man in his innocence addressed himself to *God* immediately of himself alone, and in his own Name, he could never after his fall from it have any more access unto him, but through a *Mediator*; *God's* infinite purity and greatness on the one hand, and Man's infinite guilt and vileness on the other after that fatal miscarriage of our first parents did put them at so vast a distance the one from the other, that in the nature of the thing there could be no other way thenceforth of maintaining any Communion between them; and therefore had not this way been found out again to bring Man to *God*, he must totally have been estranged from him for ever after. But *God* of his infinite Mercy having resolved not thus to cast us off, he appointed us a *Mediator* as soon as he had fallen, and promised to send him in his appointed time to take our Nature upon him, and therein pay down that price of redemption for us; by virtue whereof, his *Mediation* should always be sufficient to obtain mercy, and pardon, and acceptance for us. And this is that which was meant by *God's* promising immedi-

immediately after the Fall, that *the seed of the Woman should break the Serpent's head*; which being farther explained by After-Revelations, the whole Religion of God's people after that was to offer up their Worship unto him through hope in this *Mediator*, and all the *Idolatry, Polytheism*, and other *false Worships* which after arose in the *Heathen World*, were all by such corrupt deviations therefrom, as the superstitions of Men, the unfaithfull way of transmitting *divine Revelations* by *tradition* only, and the decay of all divine Knowledge, occasioned thereby, in process of time, introduced among them. For when Mankind began to encrease after the Flood, and they were taught from *Noah* their Forefather thus to worship *God* through hope in a *Mediator*, as the knowledge of those divine Truths which he delivered to them began to decay, and Superstition to encrease among them, they began to determine themselves to such *Mediators*, as their own imaginations led them to phancy, and some chose *Angels* and others Men deceased for this office; and in process of time erected *Temples* and *Images* unto them, and honoured them with divine Worship in order to render them the more helpfull and beneficent un-

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to them. The *Babylonians* or *Chaldeans*, who were the first formed State after the Flood, looked on *Angels* to have been the *Mediators* *God* had appointed, through whom they were to come unto him; and for this reason directed their Worship to the *Sun*, and *Moon*, and the rest of the *Planets*, which they fancied to be the *Habitations*, where those *Angels* dwelt; and also erected *Images* unto them, into which they reckoned their influence and divine power did descend, and remain with them, when those Luminaries themselves were set and disappeared in their Horizon, so that their notion was to make their addresses through the *Images* to the *Planets*, and through the *Planets* to the *Angels* that dwelt in them, and through the *Angels* to *God* himself, whom they acknowledged to be the one supreme Being, who was the *Creator* and *Governour* of all things. And this was the first *Idolatrous Religion*, which was established in the World, and long prevailed over a great part of it, and is still preserved in the *East* among the *Seet* of the *Sabians* even to this day. But the *Perians* not liking the Worship of the *Planets* by *Images*, would endure no other *symbol* to represent those glorious Luminaries by, but *fire* only,

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of which they reckoned them to be Constituted; and therefore wherever they prevailed, they destroyed all *Images* out of the *Temples*, and placed fire in their stead: And from hence the *Magi* or the *Worshippers of Fire* had their Original. But from their having one *Symbol*, they speedily came to the asserting but of one *Deity* represented by it, which they would have to be *Light*, and that of the mixture of this and *Darkness* all things in this World were compounded; that *Light* was the cause or principle of all Good, and *Darkness* the cause or principle of all Evil; and therefore under the *Symbol of Fire* they worshipped *Light* as their *God*, but detested *Darkness* in the same manner as we do the *Devil*. And from hence *Manes* the *Heretick* had his two Principles, which he would have introduced into the *Christian Religion*. But above both these they acknowledged a *supreme God*, in respect of whom their *God Light*, was but an inferior *Deity*, or a *God Mediator*, by whom they were to have access unto him. And this *Religion* obtained through all *Perſia*, and other Parts on the *East* of it, and doth there remain even unto this day among the *Perſees* in *India*, and the *Inhabitants* of the *Province* of *Kerman*,

on the *Southern Coast of Persia*. But the Practice of the *Babylonians* or *Chaldeans* in worshipping their *Gods Mediators* by *Images* obtained in all the *Western Parts* of the *World*. For they holding, that they were to have access to *God* through *Angels* as their *Mediators*, and to the *Angels* through the *Planets*, and to the *Planets* through the *Images* which they erected to them, did give to those *Images* the names of the *Planets*, and under those names paid divine Worship unto them, which *Idolatry* passing from *Babylon* or *Chaldea* into *Arabia*, and from thence to the *Egyptians* and *Phœnicians* was by them carried into *Greece*, and from thence spread it self into all Parts on this *Western-side* of the *World*, as that of the *Magi* did on the *Eastern*. For the chief *Gods* of the *Greeks*, as well as the Names by which they were called, came from the *Egyptians* and *Phœnicians*, and were no more than the *Images*, by which the *Babylonians* worshipped the *Sun, Moon*, and other *Planets* with the Names of those *Planets* given unto them. Afterward indeed they added to their number other *Deities* also, which were originally either some of the fixed Stars, or else the Souls of Men departed, as of *Bel* or *Belus* among

among the *Babylonians*, *Abraham* and *Ijmael* among the *Arabians*, *Orus* and *Osiiris* among the *Egyptians*, *Æsculapius* and *Hercules* among the *Greeks*, and *Romulus* or *Quirinus* among the *Romans*. For it early began a Custom among all the Worshippers of *Images*, as well *Greeks* as *Barbarians* to Deify Men departed, reckoning those, who lived justly and righ-teously, or had made themselves eminent by any great and worthy Actions in this life, to have those habitations allotted them in the *Heavens* above, where they were in a Capacity to be *Mediators* to *God* for them; and therefore they offered divine Worship to them as such. And this was it which gave occasion to so many *Apotheoses's* or *Deifications* among them, and so vastly encreased the number of their *Gods* in all the *Idolatrous Parts* of the *World*, and also the various Methods of Superstition whereby they paid their Worship unto them. Yet they all still held to their notion of *one supreme God*, and reckoned all the others to be no more than *God's Mediators* under him. And this *one God*, whom they held to be made of none, and to be the Maker or Father of all things else that are, was among the *Chaldeans* of old (as still among the

the *Sabians*, who are the remainder of them) called *Deus Deorum*, and among the *Arabs*, *Allah Taal*, i. e. the *high or supreme God*; and agreeable hereto, among the *Greeks*, was there also their *πατήρ ἀνδρῶν θεός*; i. e. *One supreme God, who was the Father both of God's and Men*. And thus far in answer to your Question have I given you an account how all the *false Religions* in the *Heathen World* had their Original; and herein I have been the longer for the sake of two Reflections which are obvious for you to make hereon.

1. That the *Notion of a Mediator* between *God* and *Man* was that which did run through all the *Religions* that ever were in the *World*, to the Coming of *Jesus Christ*, and was the *Fundamental Principle* which prevailed in every one of them as to all the *Worship* which was practised in them, which could no otherwise become so universal among *Mankind* but by a *Tradition* as universally delivered unto them. And what can better account both for this *Tradition*, and also the *Universality* of it, than what is delivered unto us in *Scripture* of our being descended from one Common Parent, who on his Fall from the favour of *God* having had this

this promise of a *Mediator* made unto him, through whom we might be again reconciled unto him, transmitted it to all his posterity.

2dly. That the mistakes and errors about the Worship of *God*, and the Service we owe unto him, which Men are apt to run into, when left to the conduct of their own light only, are monstrous and endless, and therefore evidently demonstrate the necessity of *divine Revelations*. For if *God* doth expect from us an account of our Actions, it is necessary he should give us a *Law* for the rule of them ; and if the *Law* of our Reason alone be insufficient for this (as from the continual errors and endless absurdities, which mankind, when left to themselves, have ever hitherto run into, it doth evidently appear that it is :) this demonstrably proves the necessity of another to supply its defect, and that in our case we must have a *Revealed Religion* as well as a *Natural*, or else we can have no certain Knowledge of the Will of *God*, or any of those duties of Worship and Service which we are to perform towards him. And if this proves the Necessity of such a *Revealed Religion* (as I think it undeniably must to every one that believes *God* will account with us for what

what we do;) all that I have farther to offer is, That you would thoroughly examine and consider that holy *Christian Religion*, which we profess, and compare it with all the other *Religions*, that are in the World; and if it do not appear vastly above them all, the worthiest of God for him to give unto us, and the worthiest us to observe, and that not only in respect of the honour given to him, but also of the improvement and perfection brought to our own Nature thereby, I will be content that you shall then persist to believe it an Imposture, and, as such, reject it for ever.

Humphrey Prideaux.

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